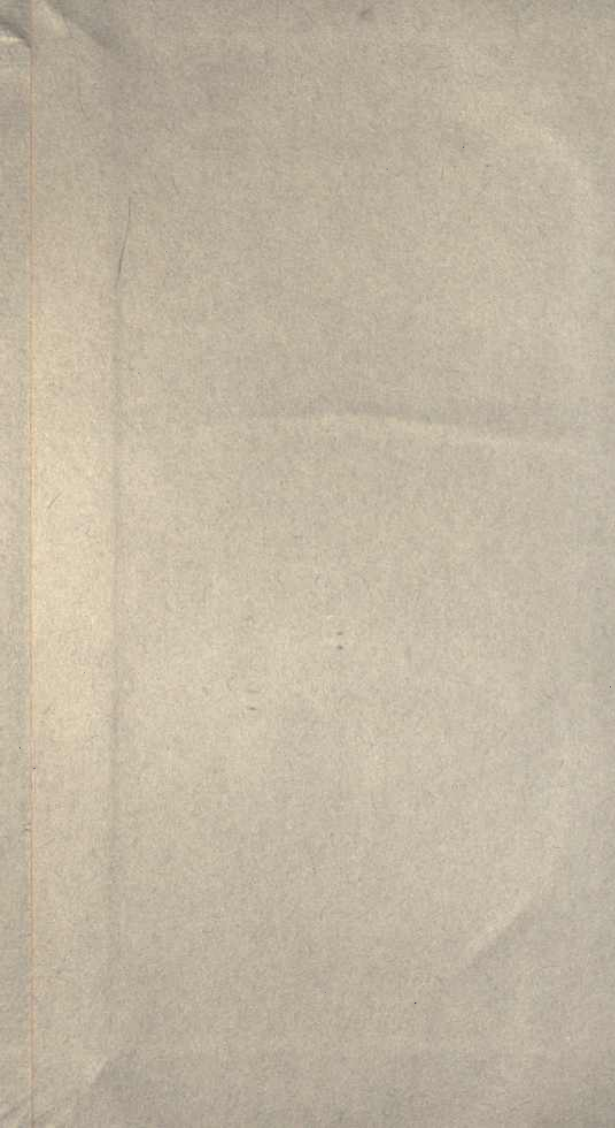


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I R E N I C U M:

O R,

THE IMPORTANCE OF

U N I T Y

I N T H E

CHURCH OF CHRIST

C O N S I D E R E D;

AND APPLIED TOWARDS THE HEALING
OF OUR
UNHAPPY DIFFERENCES AND DIVISIONS.

Ενδυσώμεθα την ὁμολοίαν, ταπεινόφρονες.

Clem. Epist. ad Corinth. sect. 30.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. and F. RIVINGTON, in St. Paul's Church-yard;
T. PAYNE, at the Meuse Gate; and B. WHITE, in Fleet-street.

MDCCLXXV.

I R E N I C U M :

THE IMPORTANCE OF

U N I T Y

IN THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST

CONSIDERED;

AND APPLIED TOWARDS THE HEALING
OF OUR
UNHAPPY DIFFERENCES AND DIVISIONS.

Printed by the Rev. J. W. Smith, at the
Church, Epiphany, and Cornhill, Feb. 20.

L O N D O N.

Printed for J. and T. Rivington, in St. Paul's Church-yard.
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MDCCLXXV.

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T H E

IMPORTANCE of UNITY, &c.

THE reasonableness of a discourse on this subject must appear at first sight to every one, who pays the least regard, or attention to the religious differences which prevail among us; or who is at all versed in the controversy about subscription to the articles of the church of *England*; especially when it is considered, that throughout the whole course of it, at least as far as it hath come in my way to be acquainted with it, very little notice seems to have been taken of the great principle of *unity* on the one side, any more than on the other; which yet, it is humbly presumed, ought to have

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— had the first place in the consideration of both.

To recall the attention of all parties to this great and necessary point, was the sole motive which overcame my reluctance to enter into this controversy: Nor, indeed, could I scarce have prevailed with myself to intermeddle with it at all, had not this, and the other topicks, which I mean to dwell chiefly upon, been of a catholick and conciliating nature. Whence I wish to appear in the light of a moderator in this dispute, who is desirous of contributing his endeavours to heal our breaches, rather than to keep up the ball of contention, which hath been bandied about too much already.

Bishop *Stillingfleet* published his *Irenicum* with the benevolent view of accommodating the differences between the church of *England*, and the Dissenters of his time. Ambitious of following the steps of a prelate, who was so great an ornament to this church and nation, though *non passibus æquis*, I have taken the liberty of adopting
the

the same title, and prefixing it to a tract, the design of which is of the same nature, however deficient it may prove in the execution, and how far short soever it may fall of obtaining its end.

What is here offered for this purpose consists chiefly of observations on the following heads:

That the church of Christ is founded upon *unity*—That this principle was carefully cultivated, and religiously maintained, by the primitive church—That an early regard was paid to it by the church of *England* at the Reformation—That not only all the other Protestant churches, and all the foreign divines of that age, but even the old non-conformists here in *England*, had a deep sense of the importance of unity; strongly remonstrated against schism; and condemned it as a great sin and heinous transgression.

Subscription to the articles of faith required by the church of *England*, in order to preserve the unity of it, having been much controverted of late, the right,

wisdom, and utility, of such requisition is in the next place discussed and stated; several questions, arising from this subject, are incidentally resolved; and some other expedients, which have been proposed, instead of subscription to the *Thirty-nine articles*, as better answering the same end, are impartially weighed and considered.

The whole is closed with an earnest exhortation to Christians of all denominations amongst us, to cultivate catholick and uniting principles, for the sake of promoting, and *endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

First, I desire it may be observed, that the church of Christ is founded upon *unity.*

This is one of the main pillars on which it rests; and this is implied in the very design, nature, and tendency, of the Christian religion.

Unity of design, and a consistence and symmetry of parts, is necessary to the duration and stability of every constitution: And the Divine Founder of his church
knew

The IMPORTANCE of UNITY, &c. 5

knew this so well, that he lays it down as a certain truth, that *a house divided against itself cannot stand*.. And yet this great truth, so obvious in itself, is at present so little regarded, that we seem in a manner to have lost all sight of it. I therefore beg leave to insist a little more largely on a subject that concerns the very essence of Christianity.

Our blessed Lord died, that he might *gather together in one the children of God, that were scattered abroad*^a, that there might be *one fold, and one shepherd*^b,—that *they all might be one, as He and the Father are one, He in them, and they in him, that they might be made perfect in one*^c.

This implies the most absolute, complete, and finished union that can be conceived. In this his last and longest prayer to the Father, Christ repeats his desire in five or six different expressions, that his disciples might be one, and kept in one body; which shews how necessary a part

^a John, ch. xi. 51, 52.

^b Ch. x. 16.

^c Ch. xvii. 22, 23.

6 IRENICUM: Or,

of religion he intended this should be; and likewise intimates to us the danger he foresaw of his followers departing from it, which made him intercede so earnestly for it. And how entire and tender he meant to render this union, appears from his praying it might be such as that between the Father and himself was.

Every institution and appointment of our Lord manifested his intention of associating his followers into *one body*. He delivered his prayer to them all in the *plural*, to shew that he chiefly intended they should use it in a *body*. He appointed *baptism*, as the way of receiving men into this *body*; and the *eucharist*, as a joint memorial that the *body* of his disciples was to keep up of his death^d.

For the constant and perpetual maintenance of this spiritual connection, Christ hath, for his part, promised to be with his faithful disciples *always, unto the end of the world*^e; and, to encourage them to asso-

^d See Bishop *Burnett* on the Articles. Art. XXXIV.

^e Matt. xxviii. 20.

ciate, and assemble together, for the continuance and improvement of it, in the several acts and ordinances of religious worship, and mutual good offices, which have a powerful tendency and influence in promoting love and harmony among Christians, he assures them, that where but *two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them* ^f. For the better effecting and strengthening this blessed union among Christians, he considers himself as their head, and the whole society, which he wills them to form, as his body, and members in particular, every one of them, of him, and of each other.

“The apostles frequently use the figure
“of a *body* to express this union; than
“which nothing can be imagined that is
“more firmly knit together, and in which
“all the parts do more tenderly sympathize with one another ^g.” And, to convince us of the perfect harmony to

^f Matt. xviii. 20.

^g Bishop Burnet ib.

8 IRENICUM: Or,

which Christ means to bring this his mystical body the church, and in what just proportion and symmetry of parts he would have it all to be framed together, however defective of this it may be at present; the apostle *Paul* compares it to the *human body*, all the members of it acting in conjunction with, and subordination to, each other, contributing to the support of the whole, and being so tempered together, that there be no schism in the one, any more than in the other; but that all the members should have the same care one of another, and sympathize with each other ^{h.}

I beseech you, brethren, saith the apostle, in this same epistle (for brethren we all are), by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that ye all speak the same thing, and profess the same doctrine, that there be no divisions, schisms, nor contentions, among you: but that ye be perfectly joined, and framed together into one entire body,

^{h.} 1 Cor. xii.

in

The IMPORTANCE of UNITY, &c. 9

in the same mind, and in the same judgementⁱ, united in affection, and, as far as possible, in sentiment, belief, and principle likewise.

Agreeably to this, he elsewhere exhorts us, *to endeavour, with all our power, to keep the unity of the Spirit, this spiritual unity, in the bond of peace, from the following considerations:—That the church of Christ is in its nature but one, one in its several parts, and one likewise in the several persons who govern and constitute the whole of it. There is, says he, one body, and one spirit, or soul, which animates it, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism: One God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all^k.*

In order to promote and establish this perfect union, Christ hath appointed several distinct orders of men in his church; for the due conduct and government of it; the instruction and discipline of its members; the keeping of them in a body;

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 10, 11.

^k Eph. iv. 3—6.

and

and for the better and more orderly administration of its service and worship in its several parts; *for the perfecting, or knitting together, of the saints; for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all meet in the unity of the faith; or arrive at an unity of faith, and of the knowledge, or acknowledgement, of the Son of God, and grow up unto a perfect man; as if we all were but as one person, inspired with one soul; and till we attain unto the measure of that stature which is to make up the fullness of Christ:—That, having obtained such a firmness of constitution, we shall then be no longer tossed to and fro like children, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight and cunning craftiness of men, according to the subtile method of imposture*¹; but, sincerely loving the truth, we shall, by that means, grow up into a firm union in all things with Christ our head, from whom the whole body, being compacted and nurtured,

¹ Gr. προς την μεθοδεϊαν της πλανεως, literally *the methodism of imposture*; an unlucky appellation.

or cemented, together, obtains increase from every connection contributing to it, according to the efficacious operation of every part, in its proportion, to the edifying of itself in love^m.

In the original this is expressed in such strong and complicated terms, as seem designed to impress the complicated and compact nature of that union, which is inculcated by it, the more deeply upon our minds. I have attempted a translation, as expressive as I could render it, of the sense of the original; but our language wants nerves to express the nervous import of it. The same sentiment occurs in another epistle of this same apostle, in almost the same words; importing, that from Christ, the head, the whole body of his church, like the natural body, is nourished and knit together in love, by the joints, or futures, and ligaments, with which he hath united and bound all its parts to each other; and by this means it

^m Eph. iv. 12—16,

is enabled to thrive and prosper, and *to increase with the increase of Godⁿ.*

A body, thus closely cemented together, must of course acquire the soundness and stability of the most complete body politick. Our Divine Lawgiver, therefore, advanced it into a kingdom, which, in its constitution, government, and laws, is framed to collect and preserve the several members of it in all outward acts, and inward dispositions, of mutual peace, fidelity, benevolence, and agreement in sentiment, as well as affection, far superior to, and in a manner distinct from, all the kingdoms of this world. Whence the Lord of it might justly say, his *kingdom was not of this world*,—not founded on the same narrow maxims of policy which the kingdoms of this world are generally built upon: And he no less truly verified his promise of building his church upon a rock.

The subjects of this kingdom are accordingly exhorted, and strictly enjoined,

* Col. ii. 19.

to do all good offices, not only to each other, but to all mankind, even their very enemies; and to cultivate charity and good-will towards all the world; still in conformity to, and in pursuance of, the same great principle of unity on which it is founded.

On this principle too it was, that our Lord *brake that middle wall of partition* between *Jew and Gentile* which had kept them asunder, and *made both one, in one body, by his cross*, having thereby *slain that enmity* which had been between them°. For preserving this blessed union, the apostle *Paul*, in conjunction with the other apostles, as there are grounds to suppose, prescribed rules of uniformity, and suppressed the contentions of men, by the custom of the churches of God, to which he required all to conform^p. And he ordained the same practice in all the churches^q. And hence, by the way, the church of *England* is justified in enacting

° Eph. ii. 14, 15, 16.

^p 1 Cor. xi. 16.

^q 1 Cor. iv. 17. — xiv. 33.

laws of uniformity, as it follows the pattern set by the apostles in that respect.

From the foregoing passages of scripture, we see what stress it lays upon unity in the church of Christ, and how warmly it presses the preservation of it; than which we need no better argument of its great importance and necessity.

Of this we shall be still farther convinced from what the word of God says of divisions in the church.

Our blessed Lord teaches no more than what necessarily results from the nature of things, as already observed:—That *every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and that a city, or house, divided against itself, cannot stand*^r. Now I beseech you, brethren, says the apostle, *mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine of unity which ye have learned, and avoid them*^s. Having been informed, that there were contentions among the *Corinthians*, he beseeches them, *as they were brethren, by the name of their*

^r Matt. xii. 25.

^s Rom. xvi. 17.

common Lord and master Jesus Christ, that they would *all speak the same thing*, that there might be *no divisions, or schisms*, as it is in the margin, *among them*. He reproves them very sharply for ranging themselves under different leaders, *every one saying, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?* says St. Paul himself ^t. He blames them for their carnal tempers, from there being envying, and strife, and divisions, or factions, among them. And he censures them again upon the same account; and observes, that their schisms and divisions must of course be productive of sects and heresies ^u. And in the next chapter he shews at large, as observed above, how God had tempered the body of his church together, and disposed the several members of it in such harmony, that there should be no schism or division in it, any more

^t 1 Cor. i. 10, 11, 12, 13. ch. iii. 3.

^u 1 Cor. xi. 18.

than in the human body^w; and, should it by any violence be maimed and lacerated; and its several parts be torn and dismembered from it, we all know how fatal that would be to it: And, whenever the like happens to the spiritual body of Christ, it cannot be less destructive in proportion; and every partial division, that is made in it, weakens, and tends more or less to dissolve the union of it, wherein its great strength consists. Therefore every species and degree of contention and separation in the church is to be lamented, as a mark of God's displeasure, drawn down for the punishment of the sins of its members.

In the church of the *Israelites*, the dreadful destruction of *Corah* and his factious associates is held forth as an example and warning, to all future generations, of the sin and danger of divisions in the divine worship; the Lord doing *a new thing*, by causing the earth to cleave asunder, and swallow up this rebellious crew, at their

^w 1 Cor. xii. 24, 25.

very rise; to prevent the mischievous effects of stirring up any opposition to a legal establishment in his church*.

It was *for the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that the anger of the Lord divided them, and that he no more regarded them*†. From the whole it appears, that Christ hath formed his church into one blessed society, by certain *laws of connection* and coherence; which if Christians would submit to be governed by, and religiously observe, would be the most effectual and indissoluble of all others whatsoever.

This is what we have good grounds to expect they will in the end be brought to, when there will be but *one fold under one shepherd*; of which more hereafter. And this society is framed and linked together upon so comprehensive a plan, that it is not confined to the bounds of this earth; which only furnishes colonies, to be received into the far more extensive regions, occupied by the church triumphant in

* Numb. xvi. throughout.

† Lam. iv. 13. 16.

heaven; both being in communion, and having an intercourse with each other.

Pursuant to this plan, I proceed to observe,

Secondly, That this great principle of unity was carefully cultivated, and religiously maintained, by the primitive church.

The very first thing that the disciples of our Lord did after his departure from them, and his ascension into heaven, was to form themselves into a small society; *continuing stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship*; having sold all their goods and possessions, and thrown them into one common stock, for their mutual support; employed in the constant exercise of family-devotion; and at the same time, with one accord, daily frequenting the publick worship in the temple.

Their unanimity and charity gained them respect and admiration, and rapidly increased their number. *Three thousand* souls were added to them in one day; which soon grew to *five thousand*; and still
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*the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul: Neither said any of them, that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; for they had all things common*². And their love of each other was so remarkable, that it became notorious even to a proverb; and was the envy of their heathen neighbours.

The first difference that arose in the church was immediately settled by the authority of an apostolical council; which ordained some things, among others of greater consequence, to be observed by the Gentile converts, that might be looked upon as mere articles of peace; being in themselves so unessential to Christianity, that they were generally disregarded soon after the age in which they had been enjoined³.

We have very probable grounds to believe, that, besides the holy scriptures, there was a symbol of faith delivered to the church by the apostles, and their dis-

² Acts iv. 32.

³ Acts xv. 20.

ciples; which was embraced, and strictly adhered to, throughout the whole Christian world; and that this, for substance, was much the same with, what is now called, the apostles creed. This was *that form of doctrine, which was delivered to the church^b*;—*That form of sound words, which St. Paul charged Timothy to hold fast*;—*That good thing, which, by the grace of God's Spirit, he was to keep^c*;—*The things, which he had heard of him among many witnesses; which he was to commit to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also^d*;—*The things, which he had learned, and had been assured of, knowing of whom he had learned them^e*;—*The first principles of the oracles of God, and of the doctrine of Christ^f*. This, in a word, was the same faith still, which was once delivered to the saints; and which they were exhorted earnestly to contend for^g.

^b Rom. vi. 17.

^c 2 Tim. i. 13, 14.

^d 2 Tim. ii. 2.

^e Ch. iii. 14.

^f Heb. v. 12. — vi. 1.

^g Jude 3.

All these different modes of expression agree in one and the same import; that if there was not some certain standard, or fixed formulary of faith, delivered by the apostles, and other planters of churches, to which all doctrines were to be reduced; yet that there were in all churches such forms as agreed in essentials, and were in substance the same throughout. These were preserved with the greatest regard and veneration; and were chiefly committed to the care of the respective bishops, who were extremely watchful over their sacred *depositum*; often meeting, and sometimes at the peril of their lives, to consult about the good of the church; to preserve it, as far as they were able, in the true faith; to prevent innovations, or to remonstrate against them; and at other times, sending professions of faith to each other, upon their agreement in which they held communion together. And when any, either of the clergy or laity, removed, or traveled from one diocese to another, they were furnished, by the

bishop of the diocese, to which they belonged, with commendatory epistles, mentioned by St. *Paul*^b; in testimony of love and unity, and of the soundness and orthodoxy of their faith.

Disputes indeed, and dissensions, arose in particular churches, even in the apostolical age; but they were not carried so far, as to be productive of any formal, or open schisms; nor did they disturb the peace of other churches: But there continued a general harmony and unanimity, throughout the churches of the whole world, during the three first centuries, not only in doctrine; but, for the most part, in their religious rites and observances likewise.

A difference in the observation of a day was reckoned so unhappy a thing, that apostolical practice and usage, alledged on both sides, was scarce thought sufficient to justify the one half of the church, or the other. And the dispute between the Eastern and Western churches, about

^b 2 Cor, iii. 1.

keeping *Easter*, was thought of such importance, as to require the authority of a general council to settle it.

As different opinions arose in the church, endeavours were constantly used to adjust them; and, as heresies sprang up, councils, some of which were general, were summoned to censure and suppress, or to guard against them. To this end *Creeds* came to be framed, enlarged, and multiplied; that the body of Christians might know what to believe and profess, and be provided with antidotes against false doctrines: All which proceeded from this general principle, namely, the necessity of maintaining the unity of the catholic faith, and of preserving it whole and undefiled.

Schisms and divisions in the church were looked upon as of the most deplorable and dangerous consequence; and those that caused them were anathematized, and avoided, as the pests of society. St. *Cyprian* laments schism as the greatest evil that can befall the church, and

reckons it to be a crime of so deep a die, as not to be expiated even by martyrdomⁱ. When any dissensions or disputes arose, to disturb the peace of the Christian world, no pains were spared to make up the breach as soon as possible. *Dionysius*, bishop of *Alexandria*, writing to *Novatian*, who had made some disturbance in the church of *Rome*, exhorts him to extinguish the schism; for that it was better to suffer any thing, than that the church of God should be rent in pieces^k. The schisms of the *Donatists* and *Novatians* are very striking instances of the sense of the church in general of such matters in those days. And how severely they branded all schism and division, and how industriously they laboured to reconcile dissenting brethren, might easily be shewn from the writers of those times^l.

Each particular church had authority over its own members; and all who lived

ⁱ Cypr. *De Unitate Ecclesiae*.

^k Euseb. *Ecc. Hist. lib. vi. cap. 45*.

^l See *Cave's Prim. Christ.* p. 417.

within

within the pale of it were subject to its jurisdiction; to the rule of faith, and mode of worship which it prescribed; and to the rites and ceremonies ordained by it: And, when doubts and differences arose, its authority in explaining doctrines, and deciding controversies, was generally acknowledged, resorted to, and acquiesced in.

When false doctrines had crept into one church, it was thought necessary for other churches, which had not been infected by them, to remonstrate against them, and to declare and assert their own principles: And, when corruptions in principle, doctrine, and practice, became general in the church of *Rome*, and had rendered the terms of its communion sinful, and therefore necessary to be departed from, which otherwise would have been unjustifiable; confessions of faith were set forth, in all the reformed churches, to declare the purity of their doctrines, in opposition to the errors and corruptions of that church.

This was thought necessary to be done, among the rest, by the church of *England*;

land; and her authority for this purpose, though now called in question, was justified by the practice of all other churches; and was in itself absolutely indispensable, in order to testify to the world what she professed, and what she reformed from; as well as to maintain her own consistency, and *unity in the faith*.

This is what I come in the next place to speak to.

How early and careful a regard was paid to this great principle of unity at the *Reformation*, appears from the proceedings of the *Reformers* in that great work; who carried it on with all the prudence, expedition, and attention, that a matter of such importance required, and the temper of the times would admit of. In the year 1548, the second of King *Edward's* reign, a new *liturgy* was compiled; and the uniform use of it was enjoined by act of parliament; and enforced from time to time by subsequent acts of parliament, in that reign, and in the reigns of Queen *Elizabeth*, and *Charles II.* In the year 1552, the

the main doctrine of the church was set forth, in the articles of religion, which were agreed upon by the bishops, and other learned men, for the professed purpose of avoiding diversities of opinions, and establishing consent concerning true religion. Those articles were revised, and without any material alterations, were unanimously agreed upon, by the Archbishops and Bishops of both provinces, and the whole Clergy in convocation, in the year 1562, for avoiding, as before, diversities of opinion, and stablishing consent touching true religion. And they were put forth by the Queen's authority.

Among other points of faith settled by these articles, they authorized the two books of *Homilies*, which contained a godly and wholesome doctrine necessary for those times; and which the clergy were required to use for the instruction of the people; whereby both the one, and the other, had sound principles instilled into their minds, and were kept steady in them; and these were very seasonable antidotes and preservatives

vatives against the false doctrines of the church of *Rome* on the one hand; and against the wild notions of the enthusiasts of those times on the other.

And thus wise provision was made for uniformity of worship, and unity of doctrine, in this church, at its first establishment; in which it hath continued ever since. Its government and discipline was then settled likewise upon the same plan, on which it stands at present: And, upon the whole, our *Jerusalem* is built as a city, that is at unity in itself^m. She doth not boast of perfection, any more than other human constitutions. Nevertheless, as far as she hath already attained, she walketh by the same rule, according to the apostle's adviceⁿ. She hath been ever steady in her principles; but not so rigid and bigoted, as to pay no attention to improvement: For all unprejudiced persons must allow, that her late divines have actually improved upon those who went before them,

^m Ps. cxxii. 3.

ⁿ Phil. iii. 16.

in their explanations of some of her doctrines; which being of a more abstruse and speculative nature; and being judged by many to be of less importance, and to be such as may be held either way, without detriment to the true faith; if our divines of later times have understood those doctrines with more latitude, and have put a more liberal construction upon them, than they had before been generally understood in; and if all are allowed to abound in their own sense of those doctrines; this wrong, if it can be so called, may surely be forgiven them. The doctrines I mean, are those chiefly which relate to *predestination and grace*. It is well known, and hath been often proved to the satisfaction of all unprejudiced persons, that the church never meant in her articles, or elsewhere, to lay down any restrictive definition of those doctrines; but was more wisely planned upon such catholic and comprehensive principles, as the most moderate of all denominations might embrace; steering a middle course between
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the *Lutherans* and *Calvinists* on the one hand, and between the *Calvinists* and the *Arminians* on the other; but never formally, or expressly, lifting under the banner of, or attaching herself to, either party. Her doctrines were settled before any of her divines went to *Geneva*, or elsewhere abroad. When they returned, she had no reason either to condemn, or espouse, the doctrines they preached; nor those of *Arminius*, who appeared afterwards. Whatever differences arose with regard to those doctrines, the church of *England* never fell into divisions, nor banished from her communion, much less persecuted, any on account of them; as some foreign protestant churches have done; and as we daily see is done among some of our sectaries at home.

On the contrary, though the zeal of the old *Puritans* for the doctrines of *Calvin* carried them to such lengths, that they branded the moderate opinions of those, who differed from them, as popish, or tending to popery; yet those opinions
grew

grew by degrees to be the general doctrines of our English divines; and that without noise or disturbance; and I hope too without having given any cause to suspect, they have since been, or at this time are, more popishly inclined than formerly.

No imputation of popery can lie against those who hold these doctrines either way; because, if there are some in the church of *Rome*, who understand them in the moderate sense, there are others in that church, the *Molinists* I mean, who maintain the most rigid sense of them; and those Protestants, who agree with them in this respect, would not therefore be thought to verge towards popery. Protestants in general agree with papists in doctrines more fundamental than these.

I believe the *Methodists* alone, in whom the old *Puritans* seem to be revived, make the rigid sense of these doctrines, to be, in a manner, the sole test of the church of *England*, and even of Christianity too. Whence they allow salvation to none but those of their own persuasion.

Loud invectives have been made by others against our church, on account of the dark, uncertain manner, in which it leaves these doctrines. This the more candid would interpret into a latitude, as it was intended, wisely calculated to comprehend persons who differed in their judgements concerning these abstruse points, which confessedly do not affect the essence, or well-being, of Christianity; while its fundamental doctrines are so clearly and explicitly laid down, as not to admit of any uncertainty.

There is yet another charge, which strikes at the very vitals of the church of *England*, and which it is proper here to take notice of. It hath been confidently asserted, “That the church of *England*, “properly so called, is not now existing.” And, if so, there is an end, not only of its unity, but of its very Being. But, God be praised! this is no more than an assertion, though so bold a

° See *Confessional*, p. 244. 3d edit.

one, that it might as well be said, the sun doth not shine at noon-day. The church of *England* not only exists, but flourishes likewise, in spite of all the efforts of its enemies, outward and inward, to destroy it: And, we trust, *the gates of hell will never prevail against it.*

If the author of this assertion knows those who profess themselves of the church of *England*, but who have departed from her doctrines, and have espoused tenets diametrically opposite to them; he doth not surely mean to call this the sense of the church of *England*; nor to denominate this church from such apostate members of it.

I proceed, *Thirdly*, to observe, that not only all the other protestant churches, and divines, at and after the Reformation; but even the old Non-conformists here in *England*, had a deep sense of the importance of unity; strongly remonstrated against schism, and condemned it, as a great sin, and heinous transgression.

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We

We have seen what the sense of the primitive church was in this respect. If we come down to later times, we shall find, that the most eminent and learned foreign divines, since the Reformation, who can least be suspected of partiality to this church, were of the same sentiments.

No one will object to *Calvin's* testimony, which is very remarkable to this purpose. "God," says he, "sets such a value upon the communion of his church, that he looks upon him, as an apostate from his religion, who wilfully separates from, and breaks the unity of, any christian society, which hath the true ministry of the word and sacraments." And farther he saith, "that separation from such a church is a denial of God and Christ; a destruction of his truth; and a sacrilegious and perfidious breach of the marriage between Christ and his spouse." And he enlarges on the subject.

With regard to the church of *England*; *Beza*, and *Bullinger*, and all the learned in

^p Instit. lib. iv. cap. i. sect. 10.

Europe, condemned the separation from it; and its communion was owned by all the protestant, and reformed churches abroad.

The first *Puritans* at home, some of whom were fierce and contentious enough, did not yet chuse to leave the church: But *Sampson*, and *Humphreys*, and *Fox*, and several others of the most learned and respectable among them, lived and died in its communion; and were suffered to preach, and to enjoy their preferments, to the number of *five hundred*, though they did not conform to it^a. Even *Cartwright* himself declared on his death-bed, “ That
“ he seriously lamented the unnecessary
“ troubles he had caused in the church, by
“ the schism he had been the great fomentor
“ of: And wished he was to begin his life
“ again, that he might testify to the
“ world the dislike he had to his former
“ ways^r. ”

^a Bishop *Maddox's* Answer to *Neale*, p. 140. *et seqq.*

^r *Strype's* Life of Archbishop *Whitgift*, book iv. ch. 28.

The first form of discipline, that was set up by the *Non-conformists*, imported, that it was consistent with the peace of the church*. And many ministers, who scrupled subscription, declared that its doctrine, and discipline, and worship, were sound, godly, and edifying; and contained nothing in them to justify separation, and make a breach in the unity of the church: Nor were there any, who remonstrated more strongly, or in severer terms, against the sin and mischief of the schism that was then made, than some of the *Non-conformists* themselves. Though they feared to subscribe, yet they would not separate; and they even wrote against those of the separation, and that with such zeal, that Mr. *Hildersham*, a celebrated writer among them, was called, *The Maul of the Brownists*†. It may be too galling, to repeat the expressions of many of them. It is sufficient to observe in general, that in

* *Fuller's Ch. Hist.* book ix. p. 140.

† *Archbishop Tennison's Argument for Union, in London Cases*, p. 474.

the gravest, and best-tempered confutation of the *Separatists*, which was made in the name of the *Non-conformists*, it is said, that they incurred the most shameful and odious reproach of manifest schism. And farther, say they, " We hold them all to
" be in a dangerous state; we are loath to
" say in a damnable state, as long as they
" continue in this schism ".

Even the *Separatists* themselves allowed the doctrine of our church to be sound; and that separation from it was not justifiable for all the blemishes, imperfections, and corruptions, which they alledged it laboured under.

The *Non-conformists*, on the other hand, maintained, that nothing could justify separation from the church, but such corruptions as overthrew the being, or constitution of it: And that granting there were many and great corruptions in it, they were not such as did overthrow its constitution: And they made use of several

* Bishop *Stillingsfleet's* Unreasonableness of Separation, p. 30.

38 IRENICUM: Or,

arguments to prove, that the church of *England* was a true church of Christ; and such a one, as from which, whosoever wittingly, and continually separateth himself, cutteth himself off from Christ^w.

In the disputes between the *presbyterian* divines and the *Independents*, they mutually charged each other with schism; into which the *assembly of divines* resolved the departure of the dissenting brethren from their rule of church-government; and their setting up of separate congregations: The *Independents*, on the contrary, alledging, that the great cause of schism had been that strict obligation of all to uniformity; which the *assembly of divines* had enjoined; and which they complained was exercising tyranny over men's consciences^x. And yet at a meeting of dissenting preachers, held in the year 1663, about the lawfulness of communicating with the church of *England*, one of them

^w *Stillington*, ib. p. 36.

^x *Stillington's* Sermon on *Phil.* iii. 16. p. 34.

relates,

relates, that he had brought in *twenty* reasons, to prove the lawfulness of it: And no one of the brethren, as he adds, seemed to dissent, but to take the reasons to be valid.

But farther: Such was the sense that the respective parties, who engaged in *the solemn league and covenant*, had of the importance of unity in the church, that the chief design of it was to unite the three kingdoms of *England, Scotland, and Ireland*, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government. Accordingly they stipulated, that they would endeavour to bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion; confessing of faith; form of church-government; and directory for worship and catechising—that they might live in faith and love—remain conjoined in a firm peace and union to all posterity—and not suffer themselves to be divided, or withdrawn from, this blessed union and conjunction—but constantly continue

^r *Ib.* p. 21.

therein against all opposition; and promote the same against all lets and impediments whatsoever. And the observation of this league and covenant they engaged to enforce by all the means in their power. And they were most certainly right in the general principle, which they went upon.

Mr. *Hales* is well known to have treated schism as lightly as most men; and his tract on that subject was eagerly caught up, as soon as it appeared; and much stress hath been laid upon his authority ever since. And yet in that very tract he saith, “That communion is the very strength and ground of all society; and schism is ecclesiastical sedition—and that to break the knot of union is a crime hardly pardonable.” No enemy to the authors of schism can place this sin in a worse light, than their friends have done.

Bishop *Burnet's* moderation, as a divine, is acknowledged by all; and yet he treats schism as a very grievous sin. He reckons it, both in its nature and consequences, to
be

be one of the greatest of sins ; which dissolves christian union ; dislocates the members of Christ's body ; creates needless disturbances in the church ; gives occasion to all that alienation of mind, all those rash censures, and unjust judgements, which do arise from such divisions ; which gives scandal to the weak ; and which nothing can justify, but the imposing of unlawful terms of communion². But this, if it ever hath been laid to the charge of the church of *England*, yet never hath been, nor ever can be, proved against it. The old dissenters were ready to subscribe all our doctrinal articles, and professed greater zeal for many of them, than they allowed some of our own divines did. Alas ! how are these people fallen from their first love ! Were any of their fore-fathers now living, with what vehemence and indignation would they upbraid their sons for their degeneracy, in refusing to subscribe

² Bishop *Burnet* on Article XXXIV. Of the sinfulness and mischief of schism more at large, see *Dodwell* on schism,

any of them? They themselves acknowledge, that their religious sentiments are greatly changed from what they were formerly. I wish they could say, they are changed for the better. All true sons of the church of *England* must conclude, that the change is for the worse: And God forbid, that such corruptions in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and such defections from the faith, as are so notorious among us, should be countenanced by law; the sanction of which was never obtained for principles of this kind in any christian country: Much less I hope will it be granted, in any degree, to principles so different from, I might say, so opposite to, those of the church by law established.

Our church still perseveres in the same plan of unity in sound doctrine, and uniformity of pure worship, as she was at first established upon; agreeably to the nature and genius of the gospel.

By pursuing this plan, she not only endeavours to preserve her own members from dissolving the bond of this union; but she
farther

farther extends her care to those that have separated from her; in order to prevent that separation from becoming total. They at present profess to agree with her in doctrine; and she wishes to preserve that agreement, being loath to part with them entirely. It is true, the ligament is but slender: But, while it lasts, it is possible it may gain strength in time. But, if it be cut off, we may then bid farewell to all hopes of a reconciliation. And, if that prove to be the case, the guilt will not fall upon her. Let them look to it, who force themselves from her embraces. If she were to consult her own separate interest only, she would connive at—she would encourage the Dissenters petition for exemption from subscribing her articles: And, if they understood the interest of their own body, they would not desire it; as every sect of them would dwindle, and fall into decay, the faster for it.

This they may be assured of, from the experience of former ages, and from the observation of those, whose opinions they can have no objection to. It was the remark

of *Socrates*, the ecclesiastical historian, on occasion of the schisms of the *Arians*, *Novatians*, and others; that, when a breach is once made in the church, it seldom rests there: But those who made it begin a fresh quarrel with each other, and upon very slight pretences become divided among themselves^a.

This hath been confirmed in all ages; and they may see abundant proofs of it in the present. It was then confirmed in fact, when the *Novatians*, and *Donatists*, subdivided themselves; and cut themselves, as well as the whole church, *minutatim*, and *frustum de frusto*, as *St. Austin* complains^b. For a judicious historian observes, “ That as the *Novatians* separated
“ from the antient orthodox church; so
“ did the sect of the *Quarto-decimani*, from

^a Ἡ γὰρ ἐκκλησία διαιρεθεῖσα, ἐπὶ τῇ ἀπαξ γενομένῃ διαιρέσει οὐχ ἴσαί τε ἀλλὰ σφαγνῆες καθ’ ἐαυτῶν πάλιν ἐχωρῶν καὶ μικρὰς, καὶ εὐέλους προφασεως λαβομένοι, ἀλλήλων διεχωρίζοντο. *Socr. Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. 20. Vide etiam c. 21. 23, 24.*

^b Per tot divisiones seipsos minutatim — conciderunt. *Aug. contra Parm. lib. ii. cap. 18. Præcidens de frusto frustum, et non se dolens ab integritate præcisum. Aug. enarr. in Ps. xxxvi. 2.*

“ the *Novatians*: And the *Donatists* were
“ subdivided into the *Rogatists*, *Maximini-*
“ *anists*, *Parmenianists*, *Cirrenses*, *Circum-*
“ *celliones*, and many other sects. And the
“ same thing,” says he, “ have we seen
“ to happen in our own time. The *Lu-*
“ *therans*, after having separated from the
“ rest of the protestant churches, were
“ immediately split into *Flaccians*, *Osi-*
“ *drians*, and the like. We see,” as he
farther observes, “ the English *Puritans*
“ are separating from the church, and
“ from one another every day. But, above
“ all, the *Anabaptists* are remarkable on
“ this account; who have so many sects
“ swarming among them, that scarce any
“ can reckon their number, or names.”

When the church of *England* had been
suppressed by the parliament; and the pres-
byterian discipline, so highly applauded,
and so long and earnestly contended for,
was set up in its stead; it likewise, in its
turn, soon experienced dissenters from it-
self, as the church of *England* had done

“ *Brandt's History of the Reformation*, vol. II.
book xxiv. p. 228.

before: Who though at first but inconsiderable in number, yet in a few years grew, and multiplied so fast, still dividing as they increased, that “they brake into
 “fractions of fractions;” and such swarms of sectaries of all sorts appeared, as were never known in this nation, either before, or since. “Infomuch that the ministers
 “of the province of *London* expressed the
 “state of things, in the year 1647, in this
 “manner: *Instead of unity and uniformity*
 “*in matters of religion, we are torn in pieces*
 “*with distractions, schisms, separations, di-*
 “*visions, and subdivisions* ^a.”

The first fruits of the toleration, which appeared among the dissenters, were their quarrels and disputes with each other, on points of small importance.

The *Methodists*, we all know, had scarce appeared, before they began to be divided under their respective leaders; and they continue to be more and more divided still. And the *Independents* set up on the principle of division, diametrically opposite

^a See archbishop *Tenison's* Argument for Union, in *London Cases*, p. 462.

^c See *Calamy's Life of Baxter*, Anno 1689, et seqq.

to that of the gospel. For, in the congregational way, every congregation is a complete and separate church; and there may be as many religions as churches. But as they, and the dissenters in general, are better acquainted with their own history, and constitutions, than I am able to inform them; I need only appeal to themselves for the truth of what is here advanced, and the consequences of it. They themselves feel, and complain, that their interest, upon the whole, is on the decline; which cannot more justly be attributed to any one cause, nor to any one more natural, than to their own differences.

The weakness of the *independent* government, and its insufficiency to support itself, was experienced in *New-England*, as by others, so particularly by Mr. *Roger Williams*; who went on refining, and proceeded in his separation from the church of *Salem*, of which he had been preacher, so far, as at last to dissolve his society; declaring, that every one should have liberty to worship God according to the light of his own conscience*.

* *Stillington*, *Unreasonab. of Separation*, p. 113. 293.

That this kind of church government subsists at all, much less flourishes, there, or elsewhere, cannot be owing to its own constitution, *as such*; which is so ill calculated for that of a national church^f.

No

This suggests the following remarks on the state of the church of *England*, in *America*.

First, It is well known, that the church of *England* in that country hath many difficulties to struggle with: Notwithstanding it is observable, that, like the primitive church, she thrives under her pressures, having been generally gaining ground there, among all the other denominations of Christians, with which she is intermixt. A most manifest proof of the superior excellence of her constitution!

But, Secondly, Her present situation is very critical, as her clergy have for some time been under a state of persecution in some of the colonies, who have thought fit to revenge their quarrels with the mother-country upon them; which shews what spirit they are of. This renders the case of the former truly deplorable; but yet, we trust, not quite desperate. For,

Thirdly, As the Divine Providence often brings good out of evil, they will have a comfortable prospect of deliverance, by the interposition of government; when it is to be hoped the present disturbances will end in peace; and the respective rights of the mother-country, and her colonies, will be thoroughly settled. And all other grievances being removed, we may humbly hope likewise, that the distressed church of *England* will not be overlooked: But that she will be plac'd

No one remonstrated more, nor more strongly, nor indeed wrote better, against the great mischief of divisions and separations, than Mr. *Richard Baxter*; the fatal effects of which he foretels in these words.

“Separation,” says he, “will ruin the separated churches themselves at last. It will admit of no consistency. Parties will arise in the separated churches, and separate again from them, till they are

upon an equal footing with all other protestant churches; and be allowed the common privilege, which none other is deprived of, the ordaining of her own ministers. For which purpose it is necessary she should have an establishment of bishops, invested with proper authority over their own clergy; which is all that is desired; and without any secular power whatsoever. This grant, so just and reasonable in itself, and which hath so long been solicited for, would at this time be a seasonable relief and recompence to the poor clergy, for their sufferings in the cause of government: Who, as by principle they are, and, in these trying times, have approved themselves to be, well affected to our government, in the state, as well as the church; this would give them more consequence, and better enable them to preserve peace, and promote loyalty in the colonies hereafter. The hands of government would likewise be strengthened, by their mutual support, and by the consequent increase of so considerable a body of their best friends.

“ dissolved ^g.” “ Men may chuse one pastor
 “ to-day, and another to-morrow, and so
 “ turn round, till they are giddy, and run
 “ themselves out of breath—till they
 “ sit down, and rest in irreligion and
 “ atheism ^h.” Would God, this observa-
 tion were not too truly verified in our
 days!

In this view, it is a question, Whether
 the toleration, in effect, hath proved of
 all that benefit to the dissenters, which
 was expected; as probably it was a means
 of weakening the dissenting interest, which
 seems to have been rather on the decline
 ever since: And therefore, if it were ex-
 tended farther, I do not apprehend this
 indulgence would be detrimental to the
 church, any otherwise, than as it would hurt
 religion in general, among all sorts and de-
 nominations of christians; and bring on a
 greater relaxation of religious principle,
 which is growing upon us too fast already.
 Division, it is true, weakens the main
 body; but, as long as the several parts are

^g Unreasonableness of Separation, *ib.* p. 113.

^h *Id.* p. 203.

divided from each other, they weaken themselves more: And our common Christianity suffers between them.

But the church of *England* hath found out the secret of defeating the ill effects of the divisions made from it, in a great measure. Charity is political wisdom. The moderation of government in church and state, and its forbearance in putting the laws in execution, which still remain in force against the dissenters, hath in a manner disarmed them. And there is besides, by a kind disposition of Providence, a strong tendency in every wound made, in the political, as well as natural body, to close and heal itself; whereby it contributes to repair the damage it hath done.

I have been led into these reflections on our divisions, and their consequences, taken in a political view. I cannot quit this subject without considering them in their religious nature, and consequences likewise.

Schism, as we have seen, and as it always hath been understood, is so odious in

its nature, and so invidious in its application, that the charge and imputation of it hath of late been laid aside; and the very term itself in a manner quite dropt; out of politeness, I presume, towards those who might be thought liable to it: And the act of toleration, having given the dissenters a kind of establishment, may have induced them, and others to think that charge not to be now applicable to them: And hence they have come to think our religious differences, and diversities of opinion, to have little or no harm in them; insomuch that a very considerable body of protestant dissenters, who would be thought to make a majority of the whole, seem to question, whether there be any evil in them or not. “If diversities of opinion be an evil”—say they, in the Case of protestant dissenting ministers, and school-masters, addressed to parliament in the year 1773.

I should be glad to draw a veil over a matter of this delicacy, and be extremely sorry to rip up any old sores unnecessarily. But the skinning them over too soon,
before

before they are throughly healed, is a false tendernefs, and a flattering of the complaint, instead of removing it. It is better to fearch, and probe the wound to the bottom ; to deal honeftly, though harfhly, where the cafe requires fuch treatment ; and to call things by their right names, though they fhould not be the moft pleafant to the ear.

Neither time, nor prefcription, nor the opinions of men, can alter the nature of things ; nor is an evil, grown into inveterate habit, to be looked upon as cured. What was fchifm two hundred years ago, is fchifm ftill. We have feen what a grievous fin this is, in the fcripture account ; and in the eftimation of all former ages. No favourable views, in which of late it hath been reprefented, can render it in the leaft more innocent at prefent. The *toleration* can have no efficacy for the overcoming of its malignancy. Indeed, the very term itfelf fupposes its continuance as a *grievance* at leaft ; and every grievance, as fuch, is an evil.

And as a *grievance*, it is *tolcrated*; since it neither can, nor ought, consistently with the laws of the gospel, any more than with the laws of the land, to be removed.

I do not undertake to charge any of our protestant dissenting brethren with the formal guilt of this sin: But it becomes them very seriously to consider themselves, how far any of them are chargeable with it. *To their own master they stand, or fall.* This I am confident of, that the church of *England* is very safe from having given any just cause for our divisions. She hath never driven any from her; and the dissenters themselves have acknowledged the lawfulness of her communion, by their conforming occasionally to it. She may therefore wash her hands from any guilt in this respect.

Great allowances are undoubtedly to be made for those who have been born, and brought up, in other communions, even supposing them to be schismatical, being sincere and well-meaning Christians; as I hope, and believe, they in general are; and
withal

withal *zealous of the traditions of their fathers.* Notwithstanding, the sin itself is, in its own nature, still the same. But there are others, of whom we cannot think so favourably. Many, too many, I fear, there are, who, not content to tread in the footsteps of their fore-fathers, have *dissented* even from them, as well as from the church; and that in some of the most essential doctrines of Christianity; which greatly aggravates the guilt of their schism. And there are others still, some of whom are gone out from among ourselves, *wandering stars*, who *despise dominion, speak evil of dignities, and separate themselves*; and become authors and abettors of new sects; as if we were not sufficiently divided already. These all think themselves fully justified, by taking shelter under the act of toleration. But that is no protection to them from the laws of God, though it is from the law of the land. We can only leave them, and their followers, to the mercy of God, and their own reflections; and to the feelings of their own consciences;

which it is to be hoped will dispose them to think more soberly of themselves, and to return to Christ's flock, from which they have strayed.

As it hath been shewn, that the first care of the church of *England* was to establish unity of doctrine, and uniformity of worship in itself, so essential to its constitution; I come now,

Fourthly, To consider the right, wisdom, and utility, of requiring subscription to its articles of faith and religion, in order to this end.

It hath been already observed, that it was the practice of all the reformed churches, at their first establishment, to draw up and settle some certain confessions of faith, as the standard of the doctrines they professed, in opposition to the errors of the church of *Rome*; and as a testimony to the world of the soundness of their own principles; which they required their own members, either explicitly, or tacitly, to give their assent to; and which they likewise solicited, and
generally

generally obtained, from other reformed churches.

And from this general practice, the church of *England* was countenanced, and sufficiently justified, in doing the same. Nay, this put her under an unavoidable necessity of conforming to all the other churches of the Reformation in this respect. For, had she omitted to follow their example, it would not be known how far she meant to carry the Reformation. Her own members would not have known, what particular doctrines she maintained; nor what erroneous opinions, or corrupt practices, she rejected, and protested against. And, had she shewn any backwardness in this respect, there would have been just cause to suspect her inclination to reform at all—that she halted between two opinions, and had still a secret hankering after the church of *Rome*.

That some provision of this kind was useful and wise, at the critical juncture in which it was made; in order to restore
the

the faith to its original purity, and to purge it from the defilements which it had contracted; and was expedient, and even necessary to be continued, in the trying times which have succeeded, to preserve it in the same pure and sound state which it had been restored to; any thinking person will soon be convinced, who considers, the importance of the Reformation; the difficulties which the first reformers had to encounter; and the dangers with which this church hath ever since been surrounded: And it is owing to the distance of time; and those difficulties having been surmounted; and to the dangers being not so apparent; that many in these days do not apprehend the necessity of continuing the measures that have been taken; which, if they were to enter more deeply into them, they would find to be perhaps no less useful and necessary still; if not more so, from new dangers and difficulties, arising from the quarters of infidelity, as well as from popery itself. The more, and the greater our dangers are; the more,
in

in common prudence, we should be upon our guard ; and the more collected in ourselves, to withstand them. The more dangerous and numerous the enemies of the cross of Christ are ; the more we should hold fast the profession of our faith ; and the more we should be united in it.

It hath been already observed, that the chief provision which our church hath made, for preserving an unity of faith and doctrine, is that of the *Thirty-nine articles of religion* ; the professed design of which is, as before observed from the import of their title, *for the avoiding of diversities of opinion, and for the stablishing of consent concerning true religion*. And they are of excellent use for this purpose, as in fact they prove to have been. Even with respect to inert matter, the firmness of it consists in the cohesion of its parts ; and in two material bodies, the more points of contact in which they meet, the more they adhere to each other.

Now,

Now, the articles of the church of *England* may be considered as so many points of contact, in which its members unite, and adhere to each other; and the whole body is kept together in its original state; and hath, without any considerable alteration, been preserved in that state ever since the Reformation.

The author of the *Confessional* owns it to be “a fact, in which our historical writers
“of all parties agree, that, during the
“reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, and some part
“of the reign of King *James* I. there was
“no difference between the episcopal
“churchmen and the *Puritans* in matters
“of doctrine¹.” And again, says he,
“The doctrinal articles were subscribed
“by all parties, without reserve; because
“the opinions of all parties were tolerably
“uniform, with respect to the subject
“matter of them².”

He might have pursued this branch of history farther; and found, that this uniformity was continued till the church

¹ *Confessional*, p. 270.

² *Ib.* p. 281.

itself,

itself, together with subscription to its articles, and all its other ordinances, was suppressed under the Commonwealth; and the presbyterian and independent discipline was substituted in its stead—That subscription to the articles in general was revived at the restoration of the government in church and state—That on the toleration it was enacted by law, that the doctrinal articles were still to be subscribed—and that accordingly they have been subscribed, or have been supposed to be subscribed, by all of whom subscription is required, to this very day. Whence it appears, there was still little or no difference between the episcopal churchmen, and the dissenters in matters of doctrine—and that the opinions of all parties were all along tolerably uniform, with respect to the subject-matter of the articles. And they have thus proved an effectual means of *preventing diversities of opinion, and establishing consent concerning true religion*: And that must be deemed the general consent of this church and nation, as long as they

they continue to be subscribed; whatever may be insinuated, or pleaded to the contrary, from the diversities of opinion entertained by particular persons, often in contradiction to their own subscriptions; which cannot in justice be laid to the account of the church. And upon these grounds, and in this sense, those divines might justly assert this constant agreement of doctrine, who are ridiculed on this account in the *Confessional*¹.

As subscription to the articles hath been an effectual means of preserving the doctrines of the church in general; so hath it been particularly serviceable in keeping the church of *England* free from the false doctrines and corruptions of popery.

But, as bishop *Burnet* observes, “That
 “ many had complied with every alteration, both in King *Henry’s*, and King
 “ *Edward’s* reign; who not only declared
 “ themselves to have been all the while
 “ papists; but became bloody persecutors,

¹ P. 153. 156. See *ib.* p. 322. Note.

“ in

“ in Queen *Mary's* days^m;” the author of the *Confessional* hence infers, “ that the requiring of subscription to articles of religion was an ineffectual measure for excluding all from the ministry, who had any tincture of popery.” And this, he says, “ the good bishop here confesses;” though the bishop says no such thing. And upon these grounds he condemns Queen *Elizabeth's* bishops; and all succeeding imposers of subscription, for continuing such an ineffectual testⁿ.

But hath it proved so ineffectual in fact, upon the whole, or in any period after the above-mentioned?

That many should give way to the times at the beginning of the Reformation, when its principles were not fully settled; and should prevaricate, and comply with every alteration that was made; and should afterwards throw off the mask, when they saw the church of *Rome*, in which they had been bred, and had so

^m Introduction to Exposition of Articles, p. 4.

ⁿ *Confessional, ib.*

lately left, again become predominant; is not at all to be wondered at. It is not said, that any of these were of the clergy, or had subscribed to the articles of religion; and supposing, as is probable, there were some of them among those false brethren, yet it is not fair to make an estimate of the efficacy of any means, from such partial and uncertain proofs, and such unsettled times, which did not admit of a fair trial of them. Let this writer carry his enquiries down to the times which succeeded the establishment of the Reformation under Queen *Elizabeth*; and he will not find *many*, if any, among the clergy of the church of *England*, from those times to the present, who subscribed to the articles of religion, and were afterwards detected to have been papists; or, as he puts the case, even *to have had any tincture of popery* in them.

Some few instances, I allow there have been in former times, of apostates among the clergy, from the church of *England* to that of *Rome*; but none that I can recollect

recollect of disguised papists continuing to officiate, or to hold preferments in it; much less in any such numbers, as to justify the above-mentioned inference; that subscription to the articles is an ineffectual measure for excluding papists from the ministry. If this writer knew of any such, I presume he would not have failed to produce them.

We may therefore appeal to the annals of our church, and to the facts contained in them, which are always the most decisive proofs; and they will authorize us to conclude, That subscription to the articles of religion hath been a most effectual means of keeping papists out of the ministry of our church. For to what other cause can this be so justly ascribed, as to the many *fences* which are raised against the fundamental errors and corruptions of popery, in our articles, and in our liturgy? The former are so cautiously, so clearly, and so strongly worded, that papists, and even *Jesuits*, with all their sophistry and equivocation, have not been

able to break through, or surmount them. And our excellent liturgy is framed in a manner so diametrically opposite to the idolatrous worship of the church of *Rome*, that almost every office and prayer of it would flash conviction in the face of any priest of that church, who should have the hardiness to use it.

Instances there have been, in abundance, of popish priests and *Jesuits*, appearing under the disguise of *Quakers*, *Independents*, and other sectaries; because none of those sects had any special provisions against them°. But though the emissaries of *Rome* have appeared in all shapes to foment our differences; yet I do not know of their having ever been found to personate the clergy of the church of *England*,

° *Quakerism* is said to have been hatcht at *Rome*. The sect of the *Seekers* hath been traced to the same origin; and both are supposed to have been actuated from thence; popish factors having been found to mix themselves in great numbers with those, and other sectaries; preaching in their assemblies; plotting the death of King *Charles* the First; and disseminating the most infernal politicks among them. For this see *Calamy's Life of Baxter*, vol. I. p. 57—60. 100, 101, 102.
either

either in, or out of it; unless it be in one instance; and whether that makes more for, or against, the purport of what is here advanced, let the reader judge.

The instance I mean is that of *Faithful Cummin*; whose story ought not to pass here unnoticed. This man appeared in the year 1566, under the disguise of a *dissenting preacher*. He would exercise extemporary prayer for two hours together; groaning and weeping, in a congregation he had gathered of *men of tender consciences*, as he called them. He pretended to the spirit, and to make the church purer than it was. He preached against set forms of prayer; called the *English* liturgy the *English mass*; and had persuaded several to pray spiritually, and *ex tempore*. And, what seemed in a manner peculiar to him, he, by some means or other, would get into the church, and preach against *Rome* and the *Pope*; but took care never to appear till divine service was over; nor to join either in the *English* liturgy, or in receiving the sacrament, in the church of *England*. Being detected,

he proved to be a *Dominican fryar* ; and said he had been ordained by *cardinal Pole*. Having fled from *England*, and gone to *Rome*, he was imprisoned by the *Pope*, *Pius V*, for railing at him, and his church, in *England*. But he convinced his Holiness of his having, under that colour, done him, and mother-church, so much service ; by the *odium* which he had cast upon the church of *England*, and the stumbling-block which he had laid in its way, that the *Pope* rewarded him with a present of two thousand ducats^p.

To proceed. Upon the whole of what hath been said, I do not see what objection any good protestant, or any one, but a downright papist, can possibly have against the continuance of subscription to the articles against popery, above all others. For can any renunciation of the church of *Rome*, and of its erroneous and corrupt doctrines, be too explicit, against the subtle distinctions, equivocations, and mental reservations of that church?

^p *Strype's Life of Archbishop Parker*, book III. ch. xiii. xvi. p. 230. 244.

But,

But, instead of subscription to the articles against popery, it is proposed, That a declaration should be required of persons, who offer themselves for orders, or preferment in the church, and for the ministry out of it, *That they are protestants.* But what will this one general declaration avail towards keeping papists out of either? will a *Jesuit* scruple to declare himself a *protestant*? and if he is called upon to explain himself, which no body will have power to compel him to, will it not readily occur to him to say, That he meant only to *protest* against the tyranny of the *pope*, in dissolving his order, and depriving him and his fraternity of their possessions?

Our protestant dissenters always dreaded popery, as their most deadly enemy; and thought they could scarce ever be sufficiently safe from it. And their jealousy of it carried them so far, as to tax the church of *England* with being papistical, or popishly inclined, for having any thing in common with the church of *Rome*;

the least rag of which they could not bear the thoughts of. And are all their apprehensions, and hatred of it, come to this at last? Hath popery changed its nature? And is it now so little formidable, that they can be content with the bare profession of their being protestants; and need nothing more to protect them from it? Is it for fear of offending the delicacy of the Roman catholicks, that they dare not so much as add, that *they are not papists*? I hope, when they next apply to parliament, they will think some stronger bulwark necessary to be raised against popery. Sure I am, that they cannot give it any greater advantages, than by thus supinely exposing themselves to the incursions of so watchful an enemy.

Of as little avail, in general, would a declaration, or subscription, be, that a person was a christian; and received the scriptures as the word of God, and as the rule of his faith and manners. For subscription, in such vague and general terms, would be little more than the shadow of
subscription,

subscription, to save appearances; and, at the same time, to evade the real intent and use of the law in this respect. Men may declare themselves christians, who scarce deserve the name, and who hold very anti-christian principles; and it is well known, that the vilest hereticks have professed the greatest regard for the scriptures, and have sheltered themselves under the umbrage of them. But to return.

The author of the *Confessional* is under great apprehensions of danger from the growth of popery among us: And I entirely approve of his zealous endeavours to excite the vigilance of our governors in church and state against it, and its emissaries; and particularly against the most insidious and intriguing of them all, the *Jesuits*; who, since their expulsion from other kingdoms, must be supposed, and are known, to disperse themselves in great numbers, in this, and all other protestant countries; and to appear in all shapes, more than ever. But we do not know what secret instructions they may have to

propagate popery, and the interest of mother-church; though she seems to have proved but a step-mother to them.

I agree with him in every thing he says about our danger from popery, and the *Jesuits* particularly; but I can by no means agree with him, in the inference he draws from it. “You will ask,” says he, “what has all this to do with subscription to articles of religion; and the establishment of confessions of faith and doctrine, in protestant countries?” We might know of ourselves, that it certainly hath something to do with them; but should never dream of the use he makes of this; nor ever imagine, that the conclusion which he draws from hence is, That subscription to articles of faith should—not be enforced, or continued—but be entirely laid aside—to those very articles, he must mean, about one half of which are directly, and in express words, leveled against the church of *Rome*; which he is under such dread of. And yet, in the

See Conf. pref. to first edit. p. c.

same breath, he endeavours to put us out of conceit with those articles, among the rest. As well might he go about to persuade us, “ Neighbours, your lands are
“ threatened with an inundation; there-
“ fore, by all means, down with your em-
“ bankments; and be sure you level them
“ all with the ground.” “ Your house is
“ beset with thieves: Therefore pray
“ throw open your doors to receive
“ them.” The language of the *Confes-
sional, mutatis mutandis*, is, in plain Eng-
lish, none other than this: And he, who
talks in this manner, might well be
suspected of being an accomplice, were
we not otherwise fully satisfied of this
learned writer’s protestant principles; and
it is much to be regretted, that a person
of such abilities should be so far blinded
by his bigotry for the cause he is em-
barked in, as to study thus to impose upon
himself, and others, by such sophistical
reasoning, as will prove *quidlibet ex quo-
libet*. But every unprejudiced person surely,
who hath the free use of his senses, will
see,

see, that the greater our danger is, the more it should be guarded against; and that it is madness to throw down barriers and bulwarks, when there is the greatest need of them. I hope therefore our senators will suffer the articles, against popery at least, to continue in force, till we have something better than a bare declaration, *that we are protestants*, substituted in their stead.

Nor would the making, and subscribing, the declaration against popery, required by the act of toleration, much mend the matter, were it more explicit than it is. For, to argue with them on their own principles, Are not these human forms? are not the very terms unscriptural? For I believe they will not find the words, *popery*, *papist*, or *protestant*, in their bibles. How then can they subscribe any such confessions, or declarations, which are not expressed in the words of scripture, any more than the *articles* of the church of *England*?

They

They scruple subscribing those, or any other human forms: And yet they can make, and subscribe the delaration against popery of the 30th Car. II. stat. 2. c. 1. which is exprest in the hard unscriptural words—*transubstantiation, mass, pope, equivocation, mental reservation, &c.* What inconsistency!

Hence surely we must be fully convinced of the absolute necessity of some *human forms*; which it is better to submit to, than to condemn them all in the lump; and let men loose, to run wild after their own vagaries; and to expose the simple and unwary to become a prey to the crafty seducer.

Another means which I mentioned, of keeping this church stedfast in the unity of faith, is, that uniformity of publick worship, which is established by law in it: Whence the reading of the scriptures of both Old and New Testament, more, and more orderly, than I believe in any other church—the frequent repetition of its creeds—the constant use of the sacraments—
and

and the interweaving of the same doctrines in its prayers and offices, which are contained in the articles—all this corroborates, and perpetuates the belief and profession of them; habituates the people to them, and fixes them in their minds.

Add to this, That the discourses of the clergy from the pulpit, and their printed works, being generally conformable to the doctrine of the church, do constantly contribute to inculcate and confirm the truth of it; and to preserve the faith pure and uncorrupt, and the people steadfast in it, without being *tossed about with every wind of doctrine*.

If the *same round of offices* be disgustful to some nice palates, there is room to suspect their want of a true relish for devotion; there being such a pleasing variety, and alternation, in the several parts of the publick worship, according to the liturgy of the church of *England*, as sufficiently recommends it to all sober and pious christians. It engages, and at the same time relieves, our attention; and the whole

whole is admirably contrived to keep up the spirit of devotion alive in our souls, throughout the whole service: And if the unstable, and fickle-minded, grow tired of such *hackneyed forms*¹; they must have more virtue than piety, or at least a great happiness of temper in other respects, not to be tired of themselves, and all about them. If such persons had the new-modeling of our liturgy, I wonder how they would contrive it, to make it ever new, and ever pleasing; unless they think, that *extempore* effusions would better answer that intention; which can come but with an ill grace from any churchman. For our parts, it may not be amiss to listen to the wise man's advice, *not to meddle with them that are given to change.*

We cannot justly say, how well calculated the constitution of other churches, and congregations, among us are, for preserving the christian faith sound and uncorrupt in them; because they are more

¹ See *Confessional*, p. 18.

reserved; at least, their liturgies, or directories, are not made so publick. But, if we may judge of the tree by its fruit, the writings of their chief divines appear in a very different strain from, nay are contrary to, the works of those that went before them; not only in the doctrines relating to the divine decrees; but in the more important points of the satisfaction and divinity of the Son of God; not to mention other instances.

Some considerable helps, to keep them stedfast and united in the true faith, I apprehend, are wanting in most, if not all, our dissenting congregations; such as some certain standard of doctrine—the use of some, or other, of the primitive creeds; and, if I have been rightly informed, none of them are used in the kirk of *Scotland*—the want of some settled forms of prayer in most of them—no observance of the great festivals, and of course no special commemoration of the great mercies of them. Add to this, that the neglect of subscribing the doctrinal articles, with
 5 the

the connivance at it, creates indifference, and makes room for a change of principles.

With regard to discipline, the old *Puritans* were remarkably strict and rigid; but the present dissenters in general are fallen into the contrary extreme. The platform set forth by the former was very narrow, and confined. The latter observe such a latitude, that they scarce know how to contrive it wide enough*.

Our articles were not Calvinistical enough for the *Geneva* discipline; and our divines were censured for leaning too much to *Arminianism*. The articles, with

* See *Priestley's* form of discipline, in his address to protestant dissenters. There cannot be a more remarkable instance of the great relaxation of discipline among the dissenters, than is to be seen in the person of this writer himself; who goes on uttering blasphemies, without controul, or rebuke, from his brethren, or indeed from any others; while *Emlyn* was persecuted in *Ireland*, and *Pierce, Withers, and Hallet*, in *England*, by the dissenting clergy; and that within the memory of many now living, for writings much less offensive to all serious christians.

many now, are quite too *Calvinistical*; and they have far outgone *Arminius* himself. The *Arminian* sense of the articles was construed formerly, as having a tendency to popery, if not to be papistical, in archbishop *Laud*, and others, who espoused that sense. It is now extended much farther by those who profess the greatest aversion to popery that can possibly be expressed †.

But the main charge of all is, That the requisition of subscription to articles of faith in general is such an unwarrantable imposition, as is not to be justified, from any considerations of use, or necessity; nor from the examples of other churches; being a manifest infringement on the right of private judgement; the sacred and inviolable privilege of all protestants.

This is a weighty objection, and deserves to be very seriously considered: In order to which, it will be requisite to go to the bottom of it; and carefully to examine this right of private judgement, on which it is founded.

† See p. 30. *suprà*.

The IMPORTANCE of UNITY, &c. 81

To think, and judge for himself, in all matters pertaining to one's self, is what every thinking being hath undoubtedly a very good right to. It is his birth-right, and is inherent in his very nature; nor can he be deprived of it, any more than he can be divested of himself. Think he must; and, as self is ever uppermost in his thoughts, he will at all events think for himself; and it concerns, and is incumbent upon him, to extend his thoughts to every thing relating to his own welfare, temporal and spiritual. And his thoughts are his own, which no man can invade, or dispossess him of; however he may be restrained in the outward workings of them.

On this right the Reformation was founded, nor can it ever be controverted upon protestant principles; and God forbid we should ever be deprived of so valuable a privilege! But the question is, whether this, in common with all our other rights, natural as well as civil, *in society*, is not liable to some restraints and

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limitations, in the use and result of it? And whether it hath not its proper sphere of action, within which it ought to be confined?

If we are to take our measures in this enquiry, from the extent to which this right hath been carried of late, and asserted by its modern advocates; we must conclude, that the right of private judgement is absolute, uncontrollable, and unalienable^u. For, from being obliged to have recourse to this right, on necessary and just occasions; and from a modest and wary use of it, in reforming from the church of *Rome*; men have been emboldened by degrees to carry it to such an extravagant height in all cases, as to set it above all controul; and every abridgement of it, though made by lawful authority, they look upon as an usurpation. But, if we examine this question by the sober rules of reason and religion, we shall be convinced, that this, as well as all other rights of men in society, must be

^u See *Confessional*, 1st edit. p. 194.

subject to some limitations, and become subordinate to the superior rights of the society in general.

The right of private judgement, by the very term of its being *private*, must be limited by a man's own private capacity, as an individual; and by the sphere of his own private concerns, in matters which do not affect the publick. This is the proper sphere of its action, as contradistinguished from that of the publick: Nor do men, as highly as they affect to think of it; always give it full scope, even within these bounds; though the same men, in other cases, will not brook the prescribing of any bounds to it.

We are often at a loss in judging for ourselves, not only in spiritual, but in temporal matters likewise, of daily occurrence. In such cases, which come home to us, we perceive the weakness of our own judgements; and, very prudently distrusting them, we think it adviseable to consult our neighbours and friends; and to submit our own to their better

judgements. In common interests, common consultations become requisite of course. When two, or three, are united in interest, it is natural for them to unite in council. Their united deliberations they find strengthen their judgements, and are productive of riper determinations: And it is not uncommon for them to devolve the management of their whole concerns upon one of their number; in whose superior wisdom and discretion their experience hath taught them to confide. As the force of their judgements, when united, is stronger; so the right of exercising them becomes, by their union, stronger likewise. For separate rights, being joined together, confirm and strengthen each other. The rights of individuals consisting of so many units, when collected into one general sum, that sum must be equal to all its parts; and greater than any lesser number of them. Therefore the right of the aggregate body must be greater than that of the individuals which form it, not only taken singly,

but

but than all of them in their separate capacities.

Apply this to the community. Whatever right of private judgement single members of it have; these rights, being accumulated, grow stronger, and more perfect. If a private person may frame rules for his private conduct; the publick surely may do the same—may make laws for itself—for the well-ordering of its own government; that is, for every member of it, binding every one.

If there be a right of private judgement; this, in society, must be productive of a right of publick judgement. For there surely is such a thing as publick judgement, as well as private; and the one hath its rights no less than the other: Nay, it is because there is a right of private judgement, that there must be a right of publick judgement likewise: For the one necessarily results from the other. Where these two rights clash, the weaker must necessarily yield to the stronger; the private to the publick; must never interfere

with it, unless in very extraordinary cases, in which compliance would be sinful; but must ordinarily be superseded by it; be governed by its laws, and act in subordination to it; when that can be done without sin. For it is a first principle in society, that the inclinations of the minority must be over-ruled by the judgement and decision of the superior number. And it is well-observed, “that in civil society, composed, as it commonly is, of such an infinite number of heterogeneous and discordant principles and interests, in trade, in politicks, and in religion; where subjects of contention present themselves by thousands every hour; no constitution can subsist a moment, without a constant resignation of private judgement to the judgement of the publick.”

The same reasoning, and the same principles, will hold good, with regard to civil

* Letter from a *Virginian* to the Members of the Congress at *Philadelphia*.

and

and ecclesiastical, secular and religious rights^x: Nay, in matters of faith and religion, duly consulted about, if but between two, or three, gathered together in Christ's name, he himself assuredly promiseth his divine presence, to superintend, guide, and direct, their councils^y. This is more than he hath promised expressly to private judgement; or to consultations separate from, and especially in opposition to, any publick ones of his church.

^x *Judicium (humanum) ut ad actiones privatas christiani cujusque, ita ad publicas actiones, et privatas, quæ publico imperio reguntur, publicarum est potestatum; et quidem summarum in summo gradu. Vidit hoc jampridem Brentius, cujus hæc sunt verba (Proleg.), Ut privatus privatam, ita princeps publicam habet de doctrinâ religionis potestatem judicandi, et decidendi. Et ita judicio opus est, præsertim principum, ut sciant quam doctrinam, et privatim ad suam salutem æternam, et publice in populo Dei tueri debeant.*—Grot. de imperio summ. potestatum, cap. v. sect. 5.—A treatise, which was written by this great man, in behalf of the Remonstrants, against those in power who oppressed them.

^y Matt. xviii. 20.

I hope it will not be disputed, but that the church of Christ is a society. This appears, in a good measure, from what hath been observed already; and that it is, in its design and constitution, the most perfect society of all others; having Christ himself for its head; founded by him upon a rock; the most firmly built, and established upon the wisest laws; and the most closely united, and compacted together, in all its parts. This is essential to the nature of the christian religion; one of the chief designs for which it was calculated, being to make human society, as well as human nature, perfect. And it militates against the very temper and genius of it, to engage in any measures which have a tendency to destroy or disturb the harmony of the society constituted by it.

If therefore the church of Christ be a society, it must subsist, as all other societies do, by the same general laws of society; which are very different from those of a state of nature, which indeed
cannot

cannot properly be said to know scarce any laws at all.

Every man born in society is necessarily abridged much in his natural rights, religious as well as civil. When he comes of age to examine them, he will find himself abridged of them; and that they had been transferred, by the laws of the constitution, under which he lives, to those who bear rule over him; who, as they judged for him before he was in a capacity of judging for himself; so they go on to judge for him still, in consequence of that right of publick judgement which they have; and of which no man, in his private capacity, can lawfully dispossess them.

The author of the *Confessional* seems to question, whether a man may transfer, or abridge himself, of his right of private judgement²: And he treats this, as giving way to an usurpation of Christ's authority; who is King in his own kingdom; and only Lord in matters of conscience;

² P. 192. 1st edit.

and he asserts, but not proves, that he hath reserved this authority to himself; and hath delegated no part of it.

But the truth of the case is, according to what was just now observed, that this right is transferred already; and every man is necessarily abridged of it, and previously to any act or deed of his own, whereby he might either transfer, or retain it; and before he was capable of doing either; and that by the very nature of man, as well as by the laws of society; whereby no man was ever in actual possession of this right at his first setting out in life. For we all get into possession of it gradually, as we grow in understanding; whereby we are enabled to exercise it. For he needs not be told, that there is a time when we are not capable of judging for ourselves: And will this gentleman call it an invasion of the right of private judgement, or an usurpation of Christ's authority, in others, under whose care we are placed, to judge for us under that incapacity?

Even

Even this learned author himself, possessed of a good natural judgement, as he certainly is, to an eminent degree, improved by study and application, and ripened by years and experience, seems, in the very instance which he is judging about, to be rather diffident of his own judgement; as he makes it a question, which he leaves undetermined, Whether he can transfer, or abridge himself of, his right to use it for himself?

With regard to the authority of Christ our Lord and King, he doth not exercise it here any otherwise than inwardly by his Spirit, and outwardly in his word; and by the overseers and governors of his church. These powers are very consistent with each other^a. And that he hath

^a Summum Christi judicium, huic de quo agimus judicio, (nempe judicio summarum potestatum circa sacra) non magis repugnat, quam ejusdem imperium, summarum potestatum imperio; quod supra ostendisse satis est. Legislatio præmium pœnamque æternam vi suâ ferens, et ex eâ lege ultima judicatio, solius est Christi. Medio tempore interfatur Christus per Spiritum

hath delegated *some part* of his authority to them, whom he hath appointed to exercise it, is sufficiently plain, and cannot be contested with any shew of argument, from the solemn investiture and delivery of the keys; which are ensigns and emblems of authority; and this repeatedly confirmed by express declarations to the same effect^b. The contrary opinion is that of the *Fifth-monarchy men*, which I hope is not going to be revived.

We are initiated into Christ's kingdom by baptism, and made his disciples, and subjects, by his ministers. During our minority, we are under tutors and governors, in our religious, as well as civil capacities. Being supposed by the law not fit to judge and act for ourselves, in either respect, we have others appointed to judge and act for us. When we grow up, we

ritum suum iudicio divino; neque tamen sequitur id iudicium actio humana, nisi intercedente iudicio humano. Grot. ib. sub titulo, Non obstare (iudicio summarum potestatum circa sacra), quod Christus est summus iudex.

^b See Matt. xvi. 19. — xviii. 18. John xx. 23.

continue

continue to have pastors and teachers ; from whom we are supposed to imbibe our religious principles ; and to be farther taught and guided by, in the knowledge and practice of Christianity. And many, too many, notwithstanding all the instruction they receive, are but poorly qualified to exercise their right of private judgement, in this respect, as long as they live. Not only the ignorant and illiterate, but many others of competent knowledge and learning, submit themselves to the guidance of others—of those particularly, whose profession and office is supposed to qualify them for such a trust ; and that not merely out of indolence and indifference ; but often on account of other occupations, other studies and professions ; and out of a modest diffidence of their own judgements ; and a becoming submission and deference to the judgements of such, as they, on good probability, presume are better able to judge for them, than they are for themselves.

• Vide Grot. *ib.* p. 228.

And

And thus they may be said to repose a kind of implicit faith in the judgement of the church; even of the protestant church under which they live. Let not any one be startled at the expression. There is a great difference between the *making* of such a faith necessary, by keeping the people in ignorance; and its *becoming* necessary by their own neglect, or incapacity; or otherwise expedient, by a voluntary and confidential reposal of it. And there will be more or less of this latter in all protestant, as well as popish countries, in proportion as men continue ignorant, and incapable, and satisfied with it: And till it wears off, the best expedient to supply the want of an explicit faith, or knowledge, is the teaching of faithful pastors in the doctrines of a sound and orthodox church. And perhaps it would be much better, as well for their real edification, as for the peace and unity of the church, if the people would be content with such teaching; rather than to swerve from it, and *turn aside into vain jangling*; whence

whence they come to such a pass, as *not to endure sound doctrine*; but having *itching ears*, heap to themselves teachers, who *understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm*; *deceiving and being deceived*^d.

Thus people set up to judge for themselves, before they are duly qualified for it: No wonder therefore they so often judge amiss. It is a premature, and *injudicious* use of their own *judgement*, not tempered with *humility*, which misleads them. When they acquire more true christian knowledge, they will be less conceited; and less liable to be *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*^e.

On the other hand, the doctrine and practice of implicit faith was so shamefully imposed upon its vassals by the church of Rome, that it was high time for people to open their eyes, and to judge for themselves; when they found they

^d 2 Tim. iv. 3. — iii. 13.

^e Eph. iv. 14.

had been so much abused by it, and it had been made the vehicle of the most gross, monstrous, and absurd impositions.

Many of those who had emancipated themselves from its shackles, held this doctrine in such disdain, and were so jealous of it, that they thought they could hardly run far enough from it; and therefore never stopt till they got into the contrary extreme. And now this is generally looked upon as a bug-bear, quite banished from among all sound protestants; and scarce known to have shelter any where out of the church of *Rome*. They think no quarter ought to be given it; and any one, who should offer a word in its behalf, would perhaps be charged, by the author of the *Confessional*, as *edging* towards popery.

Notwithstanding, I must own myself so much a *papist*, as to say for *implicit faith*, that there is, and ever will be, much of it in the world, whether we will or no. It creeps into every department of life in spite of us. It is necessary to the very
neces-

necessaries of it. We can neither eat, drink, nor sleep, without it : Neither can we keep it out of the church, or conventicle.

It may not here be improper to speak a word, or two, to the case of youth being required to subscribe to the *Thirty-nine articles of religion*, at their matriculation into the university of *Oxford*.

These young persons are generally in a state of minority ; and are not deemed, by the laws of their country, to have discretion enough for the management of their own secular affairs. The municipal law of the university is, in this respect, perfectly conformable to the law of the land in general : And is it not fit it should be so ? It cannot be expected they should be better qualified to judge of abstruse points in divinity, than of the propriety of laying out their own money. They have been hitherto under guardians and tutors : They are necessarily so still. Are they notwithstanding desirous of knowing what they subscribe ? and resolved to study and weigh

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every

every article, before they signify their assent and consent to it in writing? If so, they are quite in the right. They are much to be commended, and by all means to be encouraged and assisted in their enquiries. If they meet with any unsurmountable difficulties, which they cannot submit to the determination of their superiors, let them withhold their hands, and be content to turn their backs, without subscribing at all, until they are better satisfied. No body compels them to subscribe: But if they think fit to acquiesce in the judgement of the learned body, into which they are going to be incorporated; they may safely subscribe these articles, though they may not understand them, nor have ever read them: And this they may do in the same implicit manner, as they do in a thousand other instances. The articles may be considered, as an initiating lecture, or as the foundation of a course of lectures; which it is proper they should pay the like attention to, as to the subsequent lectures delivered to them, both publick

publick and private. And if it is not unsuitable to the state of grown persons, as men and christians, to pay a proper deference to the doctrine of their teachers, and to the wisdom of the church; it is much more becoming the modesty and ingenuity of youth, to pay that obedience of their understanding to those, of whom they come to learn.

Such students of the university, as are designed for the ministry of the church, must of course make these articles a part of their study, as a necessary preparation for it; their unfeigned assent and consent to the doctrines contained in them being what they will be again required to signify in writing, in order to their admission into the ministry; and then they are supposed to do it more explicitly. And I will not dissemble my wishes, that the *Thirty-nine articles of religion*, and divinity in general, were more studied, and lectured upon, both in publick and private, than I doubt they are, in both universities. Young men would not then come so poorly qualified,

when they offer themselves for holy orders, as, I speak from experience, I have been too often grieved to find them.

As matters stand, sufficient time is allowed students in both universities to peruse and weigh the purport of the articles; and either to proceed in their design, or betake themselves to other callings, or professions, if they scruple subscribing to them. For this is required by our church of none, but members of the university, clergymen, or ministers, and school-masters; though other churches have extended this test much farther.

Fuller observes, that in the church of *England*, “no lay person,” except as above, “was required to subscribe; no magistrate; none of the commons, according to the severity in other places. For the persecuted church of the *English* in *Frankford*, in *Queen Mary’s* days, demanded subscription to their discipline of every man, yea even of women: And the *Scotch*, in the minority of *King James*, exacted it of noblemen, gentlemen,

“ gentlemen, and courtiers; which here
“ was extended only to men of ecclesi-
“ astical functions^f.” And the holy dis-
cipline of the *Puritans* here in *England*
enjoined, “ That every one, as well men
“ as women, which desired to be received
“ into their congregation, should make a
“ declaration, or confession of their faith,
“ before the ministers, and elders, shewing
“ himself fully to consent and agree with
“ the doctrine of the church; and sub-
“ mitting themselves to the discipline of
“ the same; and the same to testify, by
“ subscribing thereto, if they can write^g.”
And every member of the congregation
was obliged to render a declaration of his
faith before the ministers and elders,
whenever they thought fit to require it:
Nor were any to be admitted to the com-
munion, without making a confession of

^f *Fuller's Eccles. Hist.* book ix. p. 72.

^g Bishop *Maddock's Answer to Neale*, p. 51. The quotation is in the words of the original, the grammaticalness of which I will not answer for.

their

their faith, and submitting themselves to the discipline.

From this comparative view, none can help acknowledging the moderation of the church of *England* in this respect.

But the author of the *Confessional* disputes the right of establishing confessions of faith at all^a: And denies, that the church hath any authority to require subscription to articles of faith, or religionⁱ.

Its authority in this respect may be defended even upon the principle of the right of private judgement itself. For if every private christian hath a right to judge for himself; every christian society must have this right, *a fortiori*. Though, if we distinguish properly in this case, it was by the prince, that learned divines in the church were ordered and authorized, to draw up its articles; and it was by his authority, or rather by that of the whole legislature, including church and state, that subscription was, and is, required to

^a P. 31.

ⁱ P. 88.

be made to them: And this subscription is made a condition of holding preferment by the state, as well as the church.

Indeed, this gentleman disputes the authority of the one, as well as the other, for requiring any such subscription; in whom we have an instance of a church of *England* man agreeing with papists and dissenters, in denying princes the authority of making laws in church-matters. But I hope every prince, either by himself, or in conjunction with those who share the government with him, hath power to enact laws, for the well-ordering of that government, with which he is entrusted: And the articles of the church of *England* are part of the law of the land; to which the same regard should be paid, as to the other parts of it; and it is as reasonable to plead exemption from the one, as the other.

A man, to qualify himself for civil offices, must take such and such oaths; for ecclesiastical functions, he must subscribe a certain body of articles. If he scruple

to take such oaths, he gives up all thoughts of such office: And if he scruple subscribing those articles, should he not be content to drop the function?

This is a preliminary condition to be complied with. Every man undoubtedly may, and ought to think for himself, in his private capacity. But no private man can go farther. If he aspire to act in a publick capacity, he must submit to the laws appointed by the publick—by those who are invested with publick authority in that respect; of whatever nature his employment be, whether ecclesiastical or civil: The same rule of conduct should be observed in the church, as in the state, in religious, as in civil concerns.

Every society likewise hath surely a natural right to do every thing necessary to its own preservation; in which general right is included that of bestowing offices. Thus a number of travellers have a right to chuse for themselves a guide for their journey: A number of voyagers, a pilot for

for their ship: And a free nation hath a right to chuse a king^k.

Hence it follows, that every society hath a right of prescribing the conditions, on which, and on which alone, it bestows its offices, and every thing else relating to them. The church of *England*, as a society, bestows the office of teaching, and administering the word and sacraments, upon condition of subscribing to her articles of faith and religion: And herein she requires no more than what she hath a natural right to require, according to the above argument; by which alone such requisition is sufficiently justified.

But moreover, the depriving her of this right would be depriving her of a privilege, which every private christian hath a claim to—the privilege of judging for herself. The

* Thus argues *Grotius*. Naturaliter cœtui unicuique permittitur ea procurare, quæ ad conservationem sui sunt necessaria: In quo numero est functionum applicatio. Ita viatores multi jus habent eligendi gubernatorem suæ navis; viatores itineris ducem; populus liber regem. *Grot. ib. cap. x. sect. 3.*

church,

church, the body of christians in general, in their publick and collective capacity, is denied that privilege by some of her members, which they daily exercise themselves without reserve, in publick, as well as private.

They likewise deny her the privilege of expressing her own sense of scripture in her own words; which if they themselves were denied, we should not fail to hear such an unreasonable restraint laid upon christian liberty, loudly, and indeed justly remonstrated against. They will submit to no *human explanations* of scripture—to no *human creeds*, or articles of faith whatsoever. But every explanation, or interpretation, which the church makes, must be expressed in the words of scripture only¹. Would they themselves submit to this injunction which they want to lay upon her? Would they be willing, or even able to bear it? Since they take upon them to prescribe laws to the church, they should at least be well assured of the practicability

¹ In this they have the countenance of the old *Levellers*; who would allow of no argument from scripture, but in the express words of scripture itself.

of them. Let them therefore, to this end, try the experiment first themselves, and apply the rule of expressing their sense of scripture in none but scripture-words, to their own practice; which it is but fair they should do; and they will soon find what wretched work they would make of it. They will be as ready to lay it aside, as *David* was to put off *Saul's* armour, which he had not proved.

Scripture is undoubtedly the best interpreter of scripture, as far as it will go; and *spiritual things* are best compared *with spiritual*. But farther explanations are often necessary; in which, from the nature of the thing, a latitude of expression must be made use of: Otherwise our liberty will be so cramped, that we shall every now and then be at a loss how to express ourselves; and all the latitude possible is often little enough to convey our own sense with clearness and precision; and to guard against misapprehension and cavil. If we keep to the sense of scripture, and the analogy of faith, the mode of expression can be attended with no ill

consequences; otherwise the very letter of scripture, in bad, or unskilful hands, might be turned against itself.

The *Confessional* furnishes us with instances of the *Calvinists* charging the *Remonstrants* with cherishing the worst meanings under scripture-words; and of the *Remonstrants* bringing the same accusation against another set of men^m.

If this rule of rejecting all human explanations, and sticking to the words of scripture only, were always observed, the province of divinity would lie within a very narrow compass; and an infinite variety and profusion of books, and learned labour would be saved. There would be an end of teaching, and preaching; nor would there be any room left for writing on this, or any other subject in divinity; we would have nothing to do, but to read our bibles; and, if no human creeds are allowed of, we shall not have so much as the apostle's creed left us.

^m P. 75.

For what ends then are such rigid terms prescribed to the framers of confessions, and articles of faith, but to tie up their hands, that all others may be free from any restraint upon their principles? This is plainly no more than a subterfuge, to evade the subscribing of any confession, or articles of faith whatsoever. If these reformers are to have their wills, and to go on at this rate, how much of our Christianity will they leave us? I hope the

With the like view, systems of divinity have been much inveighed against, and systematical divines have been arraigned; in general terms indeed, but in such terms, as if there were something monstrous in them; and as if they were pregnant with I know not what mischief. But is there any thing so very bad in systems, and the writers of them, as such? A system of any science is a methodical combination and arrangement of parts, concurring to make one consistent whole: And a system of divinity is, in other words, no more than a consistent body of divinity. And should

110 IRENICUM: Or,

should it not be such? Should not every whole be so fitly framed together, as to have the concurrence and consent of all its parts conspiring to the formation of it? Without which, it would be such a motley and ridiculous piece, as the poet describes—

ut nec pes, nec caput uni

Reddatur formæ — cui unus et alter

Affuitur pedibus

I hope the holy scripture will be allowed to be consistent with itself in all its parts. Therefore surely it is possible a consistent scheme of *agenda et credenda* may be drawn from it. The Ten Commandments are a system of moral duties. Are they the worse for that? The Apostles Creed contains a system of truths to be believed, not indeed in scripture terms, *to- tidem verbis*; yet in substance to be found there. Is this the reason why that, and all other creeds, are condemned? There were creeds before there were any written gospels; for we find references to, and recitals, of, some short formularies of this kind

kind in the gospels themselves. I hope they will let us have them.

I own there may have been systems of divinity so clumsily drawn up, and so awkwardly put together, as not to harmonize with themselves; and glaring contradictions might perhaps be found in them. Some likewise may contain doctrines that are inconsistent with the analogy of faith. Let such, if such there be, be pointed out, and rejected. But let not all systematical, and regular writings be condemned in the lump, for the sake of them. Systematical writers are much disdained, for their being narrow-minded, and too much cramped and confined in their notions. Their notions, I presume, are grounded upon scripture, by which their minds are limited; and within which I am sure they may find room enough to expatiate. If others contend for transgressing these bounds, to themselves be it. *We have no such custom, nor the churches of God.*

I wish

I wish such considerations as these may contribute to overcome that aversion, which many have conceived against systems in general; and plead so far in their behalf, that they may have fair quarter given them. For it is with no particular view to the church of *England*, any other-wise than as it is a branch of the catholic church of Christ, professing a consistent set of doctrines, that I have offered this apology for systems of divinity; which are alone quarreled with. For I do not find, that systems in other sciences are at all disapproved of; a shrewd sign that there is something worse at bottom; which this is but a veil for.

To what hath been said concerning the right of private judgement, it may not be amiss to add a few considerations on the *exercise* of that right.

And here surely some *decorum* should be observed in this respect; some regard paid by individuals to the whole body; and some degree of veneration should be reckoned due from private christians, in
judging

judging for themselves, to the judgement of those *who bear rule over them, and watch for their souls, attending continually on this very thing.*

The exercise of private judgement is not only the right, but the duty of all christians, as far as they have it in their power; that they may be able to *give a reason of the hope that is in them.*

But let them at the same time remember, that this judgement of theirs is *private*; in virtue of which, they can have no right, or pretence, to dictate to others—much less to the church in general—and much less still should they set up their own judgements in opposition to hers—to thwart and contradict it—disdain all deference to her judgement; and assume such a self-sufficiency, as sets itself above all government and control.

Every good christian, and every peaceable member of society, in the exercise of his private judgement, how far soever he is capable of carrying it, will put the most favourable construction upon doctrines and

ordinances, grown venerable by age ; and long ago established by lawful authority. He will endeavour to bring his own sentiments into a conformity to them, as far as is consistent with the clear dictates of reason and scripture. He will be more inclined, when doubts arise, to suspect some error in his own apprehensions, some fallacy in his own reasonings, than in decisions grounded on such respectable sanctions. He will proceed with the utmost caution ; and will get the best information he can have, for the solving of his doubts and difficulties. He will add prayer to study ; and beseech God to illuminate his understanding, rectify his errors, and to grant him a right apprehension, in this, and all other respects. And if, after all his endeavours, he finds himself under a necessity of differing in judgement from his superiors, he will keep his sentiments to himself ; unless he thinks it will be more for the good of religion to divulge them : In which case, he will do it with modesty, deference, and openness

openness to conviction; *not contentious, heady, high-minded—not despising government, nor presumptuous, and self-willed; but afraid to speak evil of dignities*^a. Though he be ever so fully persuaded in his own mind; he will cast down his own reasonings, rather than destroy the unity, or disturb the peace, of the church. That charity which he owes to all mankind, he will think is more especially due to the established church—that charity, which *beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*^o.

He will consider, that under a free and settled government, every man is supposed to have given his consent, either expressly, or tacitly, by himself, or his representatives, to all its laws and injunctions; and that there is but one, and the same rule to judge by, in all cases, relating to all the parts of it, in church and state: And as in the state we are to submit to all its laws, enacted by lawful authority, which are

^a 2 Tim. iii. 4. 2 Pet. ii. 10.

^o 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

agreeable to its constitution; and have a tendency to preserve, and not to overthrow, and destroy it: So in the church, while her antient constitution is preserved; and no innovations in doctrine, nor incroachments of power, are made, or attempted; here the subject hath no cause to complain; nor any pretence to withdraw his submission, or exercise his right of private judgement; so far as to disturb the peace of the church; to excite jealousies; or foment divisions in, or separations from her.

The church of *England* cannot be justly charged with any attempts of these kinds. With regard to doctrine, it hath been already observed, that it is invariably the same, as it was, when first settled at the Reformation; no formal alterations having been made in it; nor any considerable departure from it; whatever hath been the case with regard to individuals; who may have held opinions different from, or contrary to, the established faith and doctrine; which are not to be placed to her account,

account, as long as the foundation laid in her articles, conformably to scripture, standeth sure; and she holds fast the profession of them.

With regard to power, the *moderation* of our church is *known unto all men*, and is often praised by foreigners, and others, who are not of her communion. Her government is so far from making any encroachments; that it is necessarily restrained, in the exercise of discipline, and all outward jurisdiction, by her being incorporated with the state. This want of a stricter discipline is often lamented by her best friends, and the restoration of it is much wished for by herself^p. But that is become the less practicable, on account of her powers having been farther abridged by the toleration. The exemption of such numerous bodies from her jurisdiction, is what she hath little cause to regret, as it renders her burden the lighter: But it is matter of real grief and concern to her, that too many libertines, within her own bosom, are ready enough to take advantage

^p See the Communion-office.

from hence, for spurning at her authority, and bidding defiance to her laws; as they know they have an easy way to evade them. Hence her censures are in a great measure laid aside, or otherwise are disregarded. Her laws are not carried into execution; and are encroached upon by prohibitions from the temporal courts: And the convocation never sits now to do business. This hath exposed her to the insults, not only of such as are without; but even of her own gremial sons; those who eat of her bread, lifting up their heel against her.

On the other hand, we have reason to be thankful to the Divine Providence, and under it, to our governors in church and state, for having preserved to our church the privileges, which she doth still enjoy. If she is deprived of any of her original powers; she escapes the *odium* of exercising them: And if in some things she is overruled by the state; she derives, from her coalition with it, the support, strength, and stability, of the common constitution.

The

The controversy, so warmly debated, at the end of the last, and beginning of the present century, about the rights and privileges of the convocation, though it then produced nothing but heat, and a suspension of those very rights and privileges; yet they have been the better cleared up, and ascertained, by this controversy; and it serves as a caution to all future convocations, when their deliberations are called for, to observe greater temper in their debates. And it is hoped the time is not very distant, when the wisdom of government may see reason for a convocation to transact business; which will be of the highest importance and benefit to this church; if properly conducted, and brought to a happy issue. X

If the coercive powers of the church are restrained, she enjoys the powers of persuasion in their full force; which are derived from a higher authority, and favour of the primitive simplicity of pastoral power. And these spiritual powers, when properly exerted, carry such force and energy

energy with them, as renders the exercise of any temporal power the less necessary; and the want of it to be the less regretted.

It is not to be dissembled, that our discipline is fallen into so relaxed a state, as not to be many removes from *Erastianism*. Yet even this hath its advantages, as we have partly seen: To which may be added, that the imputation of an enslaving, tyrannical, hierarchy cannot, with any justice, be applicable to our church at present, whatever it might have been heretofore; though it is as liberally applied to her now, as if she were in the *zenith* of her power, and enforced it with the utmost rigour. Indeed, an hierarchy, as such, hath nothing tyrannical, or even arbitrary, in the idea of it. The title is venerable; it being a government *in sacris*, administered by persons of a sacerdotal character; which therefore the church of *England* hath a just claim to, though it was never affected by her. And if used only by way of distinction from presbyterian, or rather independent, government, which is partly
 2 adm-

administered by laymen, it hath nothing improper or invidious in it. But this sacred government having been abused by the church of *Rome* to the worst of purposes, usurping *dominion over men's faith, and lording it over God's heritage*, in a most cruel and tyrannical manner, the idea of despotick power was transferred to the hierarchy of the church of *England*, by those who were disaffected towards her; and the imputation, however undeservedly, hath been industriously propagated ever since.

The church of *England* disclaims all pretensions to supremacy; and acknowledges the King's Majesty to be, under Christ, the supreme head of the church, as well as of the state. This acknowledgement is founded in the *act* of submission, made to King *Henry VIII*, which continued in force during the reign of *Edward VI*, and was revived i *Elizabeth*. An oath was framed in recognition of this supremacy; and enjoined to be taken by all officers and ministers, ecclesiastical
and

and civil. The *thirty-seventh* article of religion agrees with this oath; and so do the *canons* of 1603. Our church teaches obedience to be paid, by all orders and ranks of men, to our Sovereign Lord the King: And the government which she claims, and exercises, is only a subordinate one, for the more regular and decent provision for, and observation of, the divine worship, and ordinances; and for the necessary maintenance of order and discipline. She sets up no *imperium in imperio*, to thwart, or curb, the civil government; as the church of *Rome* doth in countries subject to her—makes no encroachments on the laws of the state, nor clashes with it in any respect. She holds no principles inimical to, nor derogatory from, the secular government; and maintains such only, as are conformable to it, and contribute to its support. The law of the church, is the civil and canon law, interpreted, and carried into execution, not by clergymen, but civilians; who preside over, and occupy, her courts; and almost all
the

the ecclesiastical courts of the kingdom are kept by laymen.

This, indeed, hath been urged, as one of the principal objections against the government of our church. But it comes with no good grace from those, who place so much of their discipline in the hands of lay persons, not professing the law, nor ordinarily distinguished by any superior qualifications for their office. The bishops are censured for devolving so much of their power upon their chancellors; and yet the hierarchy is thought to have too much power still. In the days of popish ignorance, few, besides the clergy, had much knowledge of the law; and they bare a great sway in our courts of law, in general^a; the people being kept in ignorance of that, as well as all other branches of science. When learning began to be cultivated; the study of the law, being so

^a Antiently the masters of chancery, and of the rolls; the clerks in chancery, and of the exchequer; were all clergymen. And the clerks of the King's courts, and of parliament, were clergymen also.

useful a part of it, was not neglected. This by degrees became a distinct profession; and our courts of law were occupied by laymen, in proportion as they became learned in it. The clergy, of course, were then less wanted in that department; and the Reformation taking place, there was sufficient employment for them in promoting it; and in the more proper studies and duties of their function, in consequence of it; which in truth continue to be the most proper for them still. They therefore withdrew from the study and practice of the civil law, which, strictly speaking, was foreign to their profession: Or, rather, they gave place to those, who devoted themselves to this particular science; and who therefore are justly deemed to be the best skilled in it; and best qualified to administer and dispense it. Their merit of course entitles them to the emoluments of it. And they undoubtedly would think it an injurious encroachment, if the clergy were now to rival them in it.

The e

There is nothing intolerant in the constitution of the church of *England*; and *Rapin*, a professed presbyterian, doth her the justice to acknowledge, “that he doth
“not find in her principles, or doctrines,
“any thing repugnant to charity, or
“tending to violence’.”

The presbyterian government is much extolled for its mildness and moderation; its principles of liberty and popularity; and its freedom from the shackles of churchmen. This government was once established over this nation; and from the test of experience, the surest of all others, we have no reason to admire it so much, in preference to that of the church of *England*.

If we examine that platform of discipline, which was long so strenuously contended for; and which at length prevailed to be set up, upon the ruins of the church of *England*; and was exercised for a while; we shall soon be convinced of the difference between them; and perceive,

* *Rapin's Hist. of England, 1632.*

which

which hath the best title to meekness, and moderation ; and which is to be thought the more arbitrary and tyrannical ; and even seditious, and dangerous to government.

This discipline, in an account given of it, extracted from the writings of the *Puritans* themselves, who lived under the reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, appears to have had a manifest tendency to the overthrow of her Majesty's government and prerogative, as well in causes civil, as ecclesiastical, in the following instances, among many others—In depriving her Majesty of all right to patronage in the church—By claiming the last appeal, and the supreme authority, in all causes and matters ecclesiastical—By making her Majesty subject to the censures, and excommunications of their elderships, and other assemblies—By authorizing certain magistrates, even to depose their sovereign, either by war, or otherwise, if he seemed to them to break covenant—By teaching that the government of the commonwealth must be

be framed to the government of the church; whereby it must of course be made republican. They farther claimed an immunity of the revenues of persons ecclesiastical, from publick impositions. They were for abrogating, or changing, the greatest part of the laws of the land. They arraigned the justice of the realm; and disdained the authority of the christian magistrate.

These, and many other dangerous doctrines, and enormous claims, they boldly taught, and peremptorily insisted upon; even threatening they should prevail, in spite of the Queen and council, and all that opposed them: And they proved as good as their word. For they adhered so closely to their plan, that they persevered in urging it, during the best part of three long reigns, for the space of above eighty years; when at length they carried it into execution with a vengeance; and put it in practice, in the whole, and every part, attended with such
confe-

sequences, as are too well known, and too painful to relate*.

Rapin's account of the principles of his friends, the *Presbyterians*, is not much more favourable, than the foregoing one. But his character of their own offspring, the *Independents*, is much worse. He says, " Their principles were very proper
" to put the kingdom in a flame, as they
" did effectually. With regard to the
" state, they abhorred monarchy; and ap-
" proved only of a republican govern-
" ment. And as to religion, their prin-
" ciples," he says, " were contrary to those
" of all the rest of the world. They
" were not only averse to episcopacy; but
" would not so much as endure ordinary
" ministers in the church. They main-
" tained, every man might pray in pub-
" lick, exhort his brethren, interpret the

* See *Strype's* Life of Archbishop *Whitgift*, Appendix to Book iv. N^o iii; where what hath been here advanced may be seen more at large, in one view; with references to the writings of those Puritans, from which the whole was extracted, by the author [of *Foxes and Firebrands*.

“ scriptures, according to the talents God
“ had endowed him with. It was the
“ particular interest of these men so to
“ manage, that the government of the
“ state should be changed, or rather over-
“ thrown; well knowing their party could
“ never subsist, but in anarchy.”

This

‘ The dissenters now are mostly *Independents*; but, I hope, are become more moderate in their principles. The laws that were made against them, in general, after the Restoration, *Rapin* acknowledges, were necessary to the church of *England*, for self-preservation; as they were always irreconcilable enemies to it; and their principles tended to the utter ruin of it; which they aimed at, in order to change it for their own discipline. And, unless they shew themselves better disposed towards it, it is humbly submitted to the wisdom of the legislature, whether it would not be still proper to keep those laws in force, by way of precaution, and *in terrorem*? Nor can they complain, that any other use hath been made of them; as, I believe, they cannot produce a single instance of their having, in these times, been put in execution against them. See *Rapin ib. ad ann.* 1640, and 1644-5.

The reader may observe, that, throughout this treatise, the authors that are quoted, against the dissenters, are generally such as are of their own persuasion;

This retrospect, I own, goes beyond the design of these papers: Nor should it ever have appeared, had it not been in a manner extorted, by the panegyricks, which I see are now publishing, on the characters and merits of those presbyterian and independent divines, whose real principles are here briefly delineated—A publication, which can answer no end, but to irritate and enflame; and to revive grievances, which, on all hands, had been better buried in oblivionⁿ. This plainly betrays a working of the old leaven out anew; and ill accompanies any solicitations for farther indulgence, to a spirit, which forebodes no good use that is likely to be made of it, in case it should be granted. I hope I may be excused, for stepping thus far out of my way; to animadvert upon a design, so contrary to that of these papers.

think favourably of them; or at least are moderate churchmen. And that the authority of all high-church writers is studiously avoided, unless recourse is sometimes had to it, for the proof of facts.

X ⁿ See the Non-conformists memorial, now publishing in numbers.

To

To proceed. Nearly allied to the question concerning the right of private judgement, is that relating to christian liberty; or liberty of conscience, as it is called: By which, I suppose, is meant, the liberty of following the dictates of conscience, in all the outward acts of religious worship. For conscience itself is very safe; nor can any force be put upon it, with regard to its inward feelings and sensations; which it is always at perfect liberty to attend to.

Mr. *Locke*, in the preface to his letters on toleration, hath these words—“Absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty, is the thing which we stand in need of.” This notion of liberty, entertained by so great a man, the author of the *Confessional*, and his followers, have not failed to avail themselves of; and they have extended it much farther, I am persuaded, than Mr. *Locke* ever intended. *Absolute* liberty is not only romantick and enthusiastical in the notion of it; but it is inconsistent

with those other conditions, of its being *just* and *true*, *equal* and *impartial*; and would be even destructive of itself. For a state of absolute liberty would be a state of anarchy and confusion; in which every man would do what would be right in his own eyes, and would be making his own will law; the consequence of which would be, that we should have neither law, nor liberty. Every man would be encroaching on the liberty of his neighbour. The weak would become a prey to the strong; and the many, slaves to a few; and those the worst among them. Even these would be slaves too—slaves to the greatest tyrants of all others—to their own tyrannous lusts and passions. Inasmuch that, if mankind were indulged with liberty to the extent implied in the term *absolute*, they could not contrive how they might be deprived of it more effectually. And, if there are any such, whom nothing less than absolute liberty will satisfy, they must go to seek it among the wild *Arabs*; for I am sure they will
not

not find it in any civilized nation upon earth.

Monfieur *Pufendorff* observes, “ That
“ an *absolute* liberty would be fo far from
“ being useful, that it would indeed be
“ destructive to human nature ; and that
“ therefore the binding and restraining it,
“ with laws, is highly conducive to the
“ good, and to the safety of mankind.”
And he observes farther, “ That an abso-
“ lute liberty, void of all impediment,
“ and of all defect, is applicable to God
“ alone ; and is the noblest attribute of
“ his supreme effence—a perfection, not
“ only infinite in itfelf, but accompanied
“ too with infinite power.” And again,
“ Whoever,” fays he, “ becomes a ci-
“ tizen, he refigns up his natural liberty,
“ and fubjects himfelf to a governing
“ power ; which includes the right of life
“ and death ; and at whose command he
“ muft confent to do many things, which
“ he greatly diflikes, and abftain from

* *Pufendorff's Law of Nature and Nations*, Ch. x.

“many things which he eagerly desires.”

True and just liberty consists in obedience to law; by which it should ever be regulated, as *Cicero* very wisely observes, *servi legum ergo sumus, ut liberi esse possimus*. And Mr. *Locke* himself elsewhere acknowledges, “That where there is no law, there is no freedom.” This is far short of *absolute freedom*, in the strict sense of the word; which Mr. *Locke* could never mean it in: And therefore, as every author ought in candor to be interpreted by himself, he must be understood in a qualified sense; but, being rather heated by his subject, when he was pleading for liberty, he let this unguarded expression drop from him; and, under the authority of his name, it hath been carried to such an extravagant height, as, I dare say, he never dreamt of.

* Qui civis fit, libertatis naturalis jacturam facit, et imperio se subijcit. Puf. de officio civis, lib. ii. cap. 5.

† Orat. pro Cluentio,

Christian

Christian liberty, as well as the right of private judgement, are privileges, which cannot be valued at too high a rate: But these are privileges which may be abused, by being carried to extremes in the use of them: And extremes in the best things are always the most pernicious. The unhappy dissentions and divisions, civil as well as religious, which prevail among us, are melancholy proofs of this great truth; there being no one cause, to which they may more justly be imputed, than to the abuse of these privileges: And, if we do not think more soberly of ourselves, in this respect, than we are at present wont to think; we may be convinced of our error, when perhaps it will be too late to receive any benefit from the conviction.

Possibly we may profit by examples drawn from former times. *Liberty of conscience* was the cant word of *Oliver Cromwell*; which he pretended to be very zealous for. We are informed of him, "That
" he headed the greatest part of his army
" with *Anabaptists, Antinomians, Seekers,*

“or *Separatists*, at best; and that he tied
 “them all together, by the point of *liberty of conscience*; which was the com-
 “mon interest, wherein they all united.”
 And, in defence of it, they contended,
 “That the civil magistrate had nothing
 “to do, in matters of religion, by con-
 “straint, or restraint; but that every man
 “might, not only hold, and believe; but
 “preach, and do, in this respect, what he
 “pleased.”

The history of those distracted times holds out a faithful mirror to us; in which, if attentively perused, we cannot fail to trace our own likeness; and discover the same latitudinarian principles coming round again; which, if they grow upon us, we shall be as much bewildered by, as unsettled, as dislocated, and as disunited, as the sectaries of those days were; and likewise as loose from all religious principle in reality, as they at last generally came to be.

² See *Calamy's Life of Baxter*, vol. I. p. 54. 90. 99. 110.

Conscious however of the necessity of some band of union, at least in appearance; subscription to the scriptures alone is proposed, as what would answer all the intents and purposes of subscription whatsoever: Whereas it really would answer no other end, than that of an unlimited latitude, which alone is aimed at; so contrary to all union, and all the purposes of it.

For the experience of all ages may teach us, that the scriptures alone, though all things necessary and sufficient to salvation are plainly taught in them, yet are not a sufficient preservative to themselves, from being misunderstood, and wrested, by those *that are unlearned, and unstable, unto their own destruction*^a. This is what scripture itself informs us of. It is therefore the highest absurdity to think, that a vague subscription to these same scriptures should be an effectual preservative against all those false doctrines, which have, age after age, been grafted upon them; and should

^a 2 Pet. iii. 16,

alone prove an adequate means of uniting us in the same judgement, concerning the great truths contained in them.

Hence the wisdom of the church hath, in all ages, found it expedient and necessary, to guard and fence about them, with more explicit declarations of such doctrines, as she perceived were in danger of being perverted from their just and primitive sense; especially if they were some of the most fundamental ones, that were struck at; and, by all the prudent means in her power, to be watchful over the sacred trust committed to her; and to keep the word of God from being *corrupted, and decentfully dealt with*.^b

But supposing subscription to the scriptures alone were to take place—supposing no other test were required, than a declaration, that a man was “a christian and “a protestant; and that, as such, he received the revelation of the will of God, “contained in the scriptures of the Old “and New Testament, as the rule of his

^b 2 Cor. ii. 17.—iv. 2.

“faith and practice,” would all stand to this test? would this give universal satisfaction?

A considerable body of protestant dissenters soon entered a *caveat* against this test; and prayed to parliament, that the petition for this request might not be granted; alledging, among several other reasons, “that a very great number of protestant dissenters, ministers, and others, would be dissatisfied, if the intended alteration were to take place.” And, with regard to those that would be satisfied for the present, are they quite sure, that all would continue long in the same mind?—That some farther alteration in the mode of subscription would not be wanted?—Whether some would not be for refining upon it?—and for making some reserves, some exceptions, and explanations of the sense, in which they subscribed, or declared? They now propose to subscribe in a certain form of words, to be observed by all: Possibly, some may be found, who
will

will not subscribe in any words, but their own.

Dr. *Hartley* disapproved of subscribing to the scriptures at all. “It seems needless, or ensnaring,” says he, “to subscribe even to the scriptures themselves. If to any particular canon, or copy, &c. ensnaring; because of the many real doubts in those things. If not, it is quite superfluous, from the latitude allowed.” And I am really so far of his mind, that if we are to have no other subscription, than such a one to the scriptures, that may as well be let alone; and we may even be without any subscription at all.

Many wish for a new translation of the Bible: And some may scruple subscribing till that is made. But who will ensure a general approbation of it, when it is made? One may be for subscribing to this translation, and another to that; and some, to no translation, or version, at all, antient or modern: But may think it safest

* Essay on Man, vol. ii. p. 353.

The IMPORTANCE of UNITY,

to go to the fountain-head, and subscribe to the scriptures in their original languages; which, to be sure, they must all of course be well acquainted with. And still there may be some, who will not rest even here. One party may be for subscribing to the original *Hebrew*; and be sticklers for the *Hebrew* verity: While others may give the preference to the *Samaritan Pentateuch*. Some will chuse to subscribe to the *Alexandrian* copy: Some perhaps to the *Vatican*; and some to neither.

What editions of the original will they all agree to subscribe to? Or, is it likely they would come to an agreement about any? It is well known there are many various readings in the several MSS. of the *Greek Testament*: And many likewise have of late been discovered in the *Hebrew* MSS. of the *Old Testament*. Who will undertake to furnish the clue, that shall lead us through all this labyrinth! And how many, in the use of their own private judgement each, would invariably follow

follow him throughout? When persons are seized with such a spirit of refinement, there is no guessing how far it will carry them. Their delicacy is offended at the thoughts of *human* articles, and formularies, and *human* interpretations of scripture. This others, perhaps, would be apt to call great arrogance, perverseness, and self-sufficiency. Can they shew us any angelick articles? or direct us to any divine interpretations of the scriptures; besides what is contained in the scriptures themselves?

But while they live among men, they must submit to the common laws of humanity; something of which will stick to them, in spite of all they can do to divest themselves of it: And they must go out of the world, to be quite free from the impertinence of other people, every now and then interposing itself. The scriptures were written by men, though dictated by the Spirit of God; and were conveyed down to us by the channel of frail mortals: Nor can they be received, but through the unhallowed hands of fallible creatures,

creatures; whatever defilements they may be thought to have contracted from them.

I have read of a man, who would not brook the approach of any human inventions to the worship, or word of God. This made him cut out of his Bible the contents of the chapters; and the running-titles of the leaves; and thus he reduced it to the bare text, divested of binding and cover; though yet he could not, for the life of him, contrive how to discharge it of the paper, on which, nor of the ink, with which, it was printed. And this same angelick man pursued the principle of separation so far, that at length he withdrew from all society with men, lest he should communicate with them in their sins. And in this condition he continued, till his children lay dead in the house about him; and he became utterly unable to help himself^d.

^d Bishop *Stillingfleet's* sermon on Phil. iii. 16. From *Ball* against *Can.*

What now is to be done? We hence plainly see the necessity of some *medium*—some line to be drawn. I could give such refiners a hint to this purpose, if they could help me to get over one objection: And that is, To take their Bibles as they find them. This might serve their turn to all intents and purposes; were it not, that the church here interferes again; under whose authority they must receive them by tradition, through the several ages of her existence; as she assumes to be “the keeper, and witness, of holy writ.” And this unluckily makes one, in part, of her *Thirty-nine articles*.

This however is the case: For as the oracles of God, in the Old Testament, were committed unto the *Jewish* church; so are the divine oracles of both Old; and New, committed to the care of the Christian church: Whence she is properly stiled, *The pillar and ground*, or, as it is in the *margin*, the stay, of the truth^e.

• 1 Tim. iii. 15.

This

This privilege, and this authority, is ascribed to the church, and maintained by *Calvin* himself; for which take his own words.—“ The Lord, saith he, so re-
“ commendeth the authority of his church,
“ that when it is violated, he reckons his
“ own to be diminished. Neither is it of
“ small importance, that the church is
“ called, *The pillar, and stay, of the truth;*
“ *and the house of God:* By which words
“ *Paul* signifieth, that to the end the truth
“ of God should not fail in the world, the
“ church is a faithful keeper of it; because
“ God’s will was to have the preaching
“ of his word kept pure, by her ministry,
“ and labour; and so to approve himself
“ to us as the Father of his household,
“ while he thus feedeth us with spiritual
“ nourishments; and procureth all things
“ that make for our salvation^f.”

In

^f Sic ejus (ecclesiæ) auctoritatem commendat (Dominus) ut dum illa violatur, sui ipsius imminutam censeat. Neque enim parvi momenti est, quod vocatur columna, et firmamentum veritatis, et domus Dei. Quibus verbis significat *Paulus*, ne intercيدات veritas Dei in

L

mundo,

In a word, subscription to the scriptures, in the loose and general terms that are proposed, answers no other end than to profess, we are not heathens, nor *Mahometans*; but that we are christians of some denomination, or other.

Nor would a declaration that we are protestants, much mend the matter. This hath been spoken to already. I shall only add here, that we cannot make a more acceptable compliment to the church of *Rome*, nor to the enemies of our common christianity, than to wave subscription to our articles. *If we take away the hedge of the Lord's vineyard, and break down the wall thereof; it will be laid waste, and trodden down. The boar out of the wood will waste it; and the wild beast of the field will*

mundo, ecclesiam esse fidem ejus custodem: Quia ejus ministerio et operâ, voluit Deus puram verbi sui prædicationem conservari; et se nobis ostendere patrem familiars, cum nos spiritualibus alimentis pascit; et quæcunque ad salutem nostram faciunt, procurat. (Calv. Instit. lib. iv. cap. i. sect. 10.)

devour it. It will be open to the incursions of all invaders; and we shall have no security against false teachers of any kind.

Upon the whole, our safety lies in our union; nor can the church of Christ ever flourish, or prosper, while it is torn by divisions. Schisms in the church are no less dangerous, than factions in the state; and concord and unanimity are the firmest bonds of society in both.

The heathen soldiers thought it a pity to rend the seamless coat of Christ: And do his own disciples feel no remorse in offering that violence, not to his garment, but to his body, the church, of which they are members?

In former times, good men, on both sides, not only lamented our divisions, and wished our breaches might be made up; but they used all their endeavours for that purpose. No less than five or six attempts were made in the last century, to remove the scruples of our dissenting brethren, to reconcile them to the church, and to bring about a comprehension. How they all,

and the last especially, which was far proceeded in, came to miscarry, is to no purpose now to enquire; and perhaps might be invidious to relate.

The ill success of these endeavours discouraged all future hopes of a comprehension; and the number of sects having rather been increased, than diminished, since the revolution, seems to have rendered such a design less practicable. The toleration then granted is looked upon as a sanction to them, which gives them a kind of establishment.

Indeed men seem to have lost all sight of a reconciliation of our religious differences; and the late struggles which have been made to throw off all connection with the national church, without any firm bond of union among the authors of them, too plainly shews, what spirit they are of; and that they are more disposed to fly from, than to draw towards, any one common centre: Whereby they become *enemies to the cross of Christ*, and militate against christianity itself.

Perhaps

Perhaps we are all too much to blame in this respect; and have all been too inattentive to the cultivation of that truly christian temper, which conciliates, and unites those that are possessed of it, to each other.

This however is certain, that we all have many great and national offences to answer for: And that it is *for the sins of our prophets, and the iniquities of our priests*; as well as for the manifold transgressions of the people of this land in general, which are grown to such an enormous height, that *the anger of the Lord hath divided us*^h; and hath suffered the spirit of discord to go forth, and prevail to such an alarming degree, that it is high time we should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; and betake ourselves to appease his wrath, by a national repentance and reformation; in order to prevent the infliction of severer judgements. If we agree in nothing else, we should agree in

^h Lam. iv. 13. 16.

this: And that may in time dispose us to be like-minded in other respects.

As this great calamity is to be imputed to our sins in general, it concerns us all to enquire into the more immediate sources of it; not with a view of accusing, and recriminating against, each other; but that every party, and every individual, may all call themselves to a strict account, wherein, and how far, they have severally contributed to our divisions—Whether they have taken an active part in them; or have encouraged, provoked, fomented, countenanced, or even connived at them? And whether, upon the severest scrutiny, we either can acquit, or must condemn, ourselves, of having been any way instrumental, in promoting, or continuing of our unhappy differences and divisions, we should all bear in our minds a deep sense of the mischiefs of separation; and endeavour, by all the means in our power, to guard against, and overcome them. We should recollect, that discord is an evil, pregnant

pregnant with many evil consequences; and that neither the church of Christ in general, nor any particular branch of it, can prosper where it prevails.

As the best means of subduing it, we should all embrace *catholick and uniting principles*; which, if duly implanted, and cultivated in our minds, will operate, with a magnetick force, to attract us towards each other: I say, *catholick and uniting*; and I join those two terms together, because they are inseparable in their natures; and neither can be effectual, or complete without the other.

Universal benevolence is the acknowledged duty of all christians; and ought certainly to be extended to all those who differ from us in religious sentiment. This all must allow. And therefore it is common to hear men make great professions of charity, towards those they cannot agree with in this respect. But where interests clash, charity too often suffers; and a slender acquaintance with human nature may convince us, that in a matter of so

interesting a concern, as religion, our resentment, against such as differ from us in it, generally rises in proportion to our zeal for it. Hence men will hardly be brought to any true, and cordial affection towards each other, when there are considerable differences in their religious principles, opinions, modes of worship, and discipline. It is next to impossible, so heterogeneous a mixture should be brought to incorporate. But uniformity of worship naturally promotes unity of sentiment; and unity of sentiment, unity of affection.

On the other hand, if our charity be sincere, and truly christian, it will warm our hearts towards each other; and will draw us together *with the cords of a man*, with the bands of love. It will dispose us to *a fellowship of spirit*; and by degrees will bring us to *speak the same things*; to profess the same doctrines; and to be joined together in the same judgement, belief, and principle. But if men are shy, and suspicious, and keep aloof from each other—If they are stiff, and uncomplying,
and

and are more disposed to widen our breaches, than to close them; let them profess what they will, they shew, that a private, party spirit still prevails; and that is not the spirit of the Gospel.

Great professions of charity are often met with, in the writings of the weaker party: But if they are not accompanied with some more substantial proofs than words; they give room to suspect, they are meant only to keep fair with those in power.

It would become all—It would be the praise of all parties, to turn their eyes, with a more favourable aspect, towards each other; and to consider, whether there be not a possibility, if not of reconciling our differences, yet of approaching nearer to each other—To that end, let not the one wait, in expectation of the other's moving first; but let there be a laudable emulation for the lead in this respect.

It is therefore humbly submitted to our governors in church and state, whether it
would

would be at all beneath—whether it would not be worthy the dignity, and suitable to the known moderation, of the church of *England*, to make the first advance?

And surely all those several bodies of protestants, which separate from her, would be moved by the example, to take some steps to meet the national church; if they would not even contend, who should appear foremost in so good a cause; each being ashamed to be left behind.

As a proof of their good dispositions in this respect, they will moderate the stile of their writings; soften all acrimony of expression; avoid and discourage all inflammatory and seditious discourses, and publications; and in their whole conduct, *follow after the things that make for peace.*

They will consider, that not only in their separate capacities each, but that all in their joint capacities likewise, are inferior in number to the church of *England*; and form the lesser body in general: And that, as in natural and political bodies, the lighter is outweighed by the heavier,
and

and attracted by it; and the weaker gives way to the stronger; so in the religious world, in this respect, the lesser body of christians should yield to the greater, submit to the laws of attraction, and suffer themselves to be drawn by the greater force, and united to it; provided the differences between them should prove to be not quite unsurmountable; and might be reduced within such a compass as to afford the prospect of a reconciliation: Because it is a first principle in society, as observed already, that the inclinations of the minority be over-ruled by the judgement and decision of the superior number. And indeed it is no more than the christian law of unity requires, that they should conform, as far they can; without putting a force upon their own consciences; and that in lesser matters, and matters otherwise of indifference at least, they should yield so far, as they are indifferent; make some compliances and concessions; and offer some cheap sacrifices, that would cost them little, or nothing.

And

And would God, they would reflect, that matters of *indifference* make no inconsiderable part of the *differences* between us!

For these reasons, our dissenting brethren will not scruple to agree, in making the church of *England* the *basis* and centre of an union, or comprehension. The author of *The rights of the christian church*, seems to apprehend, that the uniting of christians under any one external head, or form of government, as the centre of catholick union and communion, must inevitably terminate in a *Popedom*. But as long as the church of *England* is dependent upon the state, all such apprehensions are as groundless, as, in this writer, they were affected.

The apostle's rule, in the case before us, merits our most serious attention. *Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule: Let us mind the same thing*¹. As far as we have hitherto attained, or possibly can attain unto; or advance towards each other, let us strive

¹ Phil. iii. 16.

to accompany one another, walk together, and bring our sentiments, as nearly as we can, to concur with each other. And if there be still some scruples which we cannot overcome, or some doubts and difficulties, which we are not able to get over—if in any such things as these, we still continue to be *otherwise minded*, God, when he sees the good dispositions of our hearts, shall, in his due time, *reveal even this unto us* ^k.

Now supposing an attempt to bring about a comprehension were determined upon; the first thing that seems to present itself is, *a revisal of our articles and liturgy*; in whatever manner the wisdom of our governors in church and state may think fit. And it is the heart's desire of many good, and very respectable persons; and many of the firmest friends of the church of *England*, both among the clergy and laity, that this work should be set about; and that such alterations may be made in both, as would remove all real objections, and

^k Phil. ver. 15.

give all reasonable satisfaction to those that are without, as well as within, the church.

The articles might undergo a particular scrutiny; and be reduced to the touchstone of scripture, one by one. The most fundamental ones, and those against popery, I take it for granted, would, for substance, be retained: And the speculative articles, with such others, as are of less consequence, might be omitted, or altered, as would be judged most proper: And some respecting the present times might perhaps be inserted in their stead. But that, upon the whole, the number of them should be rather reduced, than added to; that *no greater burden be laid* upon subscribers, than what consists of *necessary things*; according to the apostolical rule¹.

As no human composition is so perfect, as not to be capable of improvement; and as there is no antient composition in our language, but what must suffer particu-

¹ Acts xv. 28.

larly,

larly, by the mutation and flux of it; and though perhaps nothing hath contributed more to the preservation of the *English* language, than the constant use of our liturgy, and of the scriptures, in the vulgar tongue; yet, I presume, no one now doubts, but that the liturgy may be improved; by the change of obsolete words, phrases, and customs—by some more substantial alterations in its service—by the addition, perhaps, of some occasional offices—and by the better adjusting of some circumstantials of external order.

And I flatter myself that when the trial comes to be made, there will not be much need of improvement found, besides in circumstantials. Our church is found in its constitution; and I trust feels no decay in its integral parts, that wants much, if any, repair. But if whatever improvements it is capable of, in doctrine, discipline, and worship, were made in it, consistently with the fundamentals of christianity, and the principles on which

it is established^m; the benefits would be manifold, and inestimable.

This would enlarge the borders of our church—would conciliate some to her—would silence others; and give no just cause of offence to any. It would, at the same time, be highly beneficial to ourselves. It would be the means of our greater edification, and would render our liturgy still the more *reasonable service*. It would demonstrate our candor and ingenuity—would testify our charity, and desire to embrace all those that separate from us. It would justify our conduct to the world: It would be an additional recommendation of our church, to all other protestant churches; and, if brought to a

^m *Tertullian* lays down an excellent rule in this respect. *Regula quidem fidei una omnino est, sola immobilis, et irreformabilis, credendi scilicet in unicum Deum—et filium ejus Jesum Christum—Hæc lege fidei manente, cætera jam disciplinæ, et conversationis, admittunt novitatem correctionis, operante scilicet, et proficiente usque ad finem gratiâ Dei.*

Tertull. de virg. velandis, cap. 1.

happy

happy conclusion, would be the glory of the present reign.

As christians, in their private capacities, ought always to be going on unto perfection; so ought they, in their publick and aggregate capacity, the church, likewise.

“ It is the glory of our *English church*,” says one of her learned divines, “ and what she often boasts of, that she is the *nearest* of any now in the christian world, to the primitive model. It is not, I presume, denied, that she might be *nearer* still: And if her glory be great, for being so *near*; it would certainly be greater, if she were yet *nearer*.”

In pursuance of this noble design, I beg leave to hint at one or two improvements more in our church; which some time or other, it may be presumed, will take place.

ⁿ Dr. *Marshall's* preface to his translation of St. *Cyprian*, p. 12.

Though our *English* translation of the Bible is an excellent one; and, in the judgement of a very learned man, the best in the world^o; yet it is thought to have its imperfections; and a new translation hath been long wished for, as one of our greatest *desiderata*. The distribution of this undertaking among several able hands, in like manner with that, in which the last translation, made by authority, was executed, would render this great work the more easy, expeditious, and accurate: And the original languages of holy writ having of late been much studied; it cannot be said we are in want of persons duly qualified for the task.

An excellent body of laws^p was drawn up, for the use of our church, at the beginning of the Reformation; but, unhappily, it could never obtain the sanction of publick authority; and it hath ever since lain dormant, as a dead letter. If the times would bear, that these laws, and our

^o Mr. *Selden*, in his *Table Talk*.

^p *Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum*.

canons too, might be revised, and enforced by the authority of the legislature; nothing would be more desirable, if any thing more could be desired, for the improvement of our discipline.

Bishop *Burnet* hints, that the Reformation was not carried on to the perfection, that was designed, and wished for; and he exhorts us to wait, and pray for such a glorious conjuncture, as may restore every thing among us to a primitive purity and splendor^a. We have waited long; and I doubt we have long to wait still, before the whole of so large a design be carried into execution. However, we may do something towards it—something might be attempted towards making a beginning. We at least may, and ought to make it the subject of our constant, and fervent prayers: Nor do I see, that the present conjuncture is so unfavourable for it, as many, I doubt, apprehend it to be. The prejudices of some churchmen, to which the miscarriage of a comprehension,

^a Conclusion of his *History of the Reformation.*

designed in 1689, hath been chiefly imputed, are now entirely worn away. We may learn wisdom from the history of it. The proceedings in that design are known to be extant; and recourse, I presume, may be had to them. They may serve as a good groundwork to build upon: And the voice of the publick calls for the tryal. And if it be set about in good earnest, our church, under the divine *auspices*, may be brought to a resemblance of the purity and simplicity of the primitive church; and our *Zion* may become the *joy of the whole earth*. It may by degrees draw near to that perfect state, which we have grounds to hope the universal church will at length arrive at; when Christ, her spouse, shall *present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; being holy, and without blemish*.

To conclude. We have seen, that there is such a thing, as to be perfectly joined together, *in the same mind, and in the same judgement*; otherwise, we would not be exhorted to it. We would not be so much
intreated

intreated, and pressed, to endeavour at what is impossible to be attained; nor encouraged to hope for such happiness, as is never to be acquired.

Such divines therefore must surely have but ill learned Christ, or must have lost all sight of his precepts, who pronounce “any attempt towards avoiding diversity of opinion to be not only an *useless*, but an *impracticable* scheme.” What! are our religious *differences* such *indifferent* things, that it is immaterial what our opinions are? Is it of no use to avoid, or prevent, persecutions, and massacres, which have often been the consequences of them? And is the peace and harmony of the Christian world not worth preserving? And to pronounce that to be impracticable, which God, in his holy word, hath enjoined, and declared to be attainable, is strange divinity indeed.

However discouraging the prospect may be at present, we are assured, by the highest authority, and by the certainty of

Confessional, p. 2,

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fact,

fact, that a perfect harmony once reigned in the church of Christ. The first disciples were *all of one heart, and one soul*: And we have good grounds to hope, that the same blessed temper shall again prevail among Christians. The prophet *Ezekiel* foretels, that the *two sticks*, of *Judah* and *Joseph*, shall in the end be joined together, and *become one*; and the whole house of *Israel* be *one nation*—that they *all shall have one shepherd*; and that *one king shall be king over them all*.*

And to prevent all doubt, whether this concerns the christian church, our Saviour himself assures us, that it likewise in the end shall consist of *one fold, and one shepherd*†. Not to cite any other predictions, and prophetical intimations of the same blessed event.

We have good grounds therefore to hope, that the time will come, when we of this nation, notwithstanding present appearances, shall have our breaches repaired, and become *one fold* likewise, and

* Ezek. xxxvii. 15—24.

† John x. 16.

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be gathered into one body, under the good shepherd of our souls; who gave his life for the sheep, that he might unite them to himself, and to each other. We will therefore beware of defeating the end of his death by our divisions.

Our Lord represents his church under the lively emblem of a *vine*, of which he reckons himself to be the root; and the members of it as the branches; which therefore can have no life, but what they draw from him. He teaches them, that, by their abiding in him, they bear fruit, and flourish; but, if they abide not in him, he most assuredly warns them of their wretched fate; which can be none other, than to be rejected, as withered branches; which are fit for nothing, but to be *cast into the fire, and burned*^u.

We have seen, that our Saviour considers us all, as one body, and himself, as the head of it. What a grievous thing is it, for the members to raise a mutiny in this body! How must they all suffer by it!

^u John xvi. 1—6.

And how dreadful the consequence in the end, if continued in! How necessary therefore is it to our mutual preservation, that it be appeased!

The apostle intreats us, to use all our endeavours *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; and enforces his advice with various arguments, to the same purpose. Shall we be deaf to them all? Nor suffer them to have any weight with us? We have seen, that by unity in the faith it is, that the body of Christ is to be edified. By disunion then it must be destroyed.

This great principle of unity is the chief cement, by which this his whole body is fitly and closely compacted together, diffusing itself, and efficaciously pervading every part; promoting the increase and edification of the whole, in love. Surely, it is very unnatural to aim at dissolving this cement, so essential to our own subsistence—to offer at untying, much more at cutting, this sacred knot, in which
all

all our strength lieth. On the contrary, we should think it incumbent upon us—we should think it our mutual interest, one and all, to conspire, in drawing it closer, if we possibly can—in improving, and in the end, perfecting ourselves in love: By which means, we shall attain unto the original standard of our nature—*unto the full measure, and stature of Christ.*

Therefore, *If there be any consolation in Christ—If any comfort of love—If any fellowship of the Spirit—If any bowels and mercies; fulfill ye our common joy; that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind^w. And put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another. And, above all things, put on charity; which is the bond of perfectness; and let the peace of God rule in your hearts; to which also ye are called in one body^z,*

^w Phil. ii. 1, 2.

^z Col. iii. 12—15.

And the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus: That ye may, with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

I cannot better close these papers, than with the following prayer, taken out of our excellent liturgy; which deserves to be oftener used in our publick worship.

“ O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus
 “ Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of
 “ Peace! give us grace seriously to lay to
 “ heart the great dangers we are in, by
 “ our unhappy divisions. Take away all
 “ hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever
 “ else may hinder us from godly union,
 “ and concord: That, as there is but one
 “ body; and one Spirit; and one hope
 “ of our calling; one Lord; one faith;
 “ one baptism; one God and Father of
 “ us all: So we may henceforth be all
 “ of one heart, and of one soul; united
 “ in one holy bond, of truth and peace,

7 Rom, xv. 5, 6.

“ of

The IMPORTANCE of UNITY, &c. 171

“ of faith and charity; and may with
“ one mind, and one mouth, glorify
“ thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
“ Amen^z. ”

^z From the Office for the King's Accession to
the Throne.

The E N D,

The Importance of Unity, Ourselves
"of flesh and clay; and may with
"one mind, and one mouth, glorify
"thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
"Amen."

From the Office for the King's Affairs to
the Throne.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt
of your letter of the 10th inst.

and in reply to inform you that the same
has been forwarded to the proper authorities
for their consideration.

I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
J. N. D.

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